THE TALENT LABS

Talent Trends Report 2026

Understanding priorities and trends in Talent Acquisition

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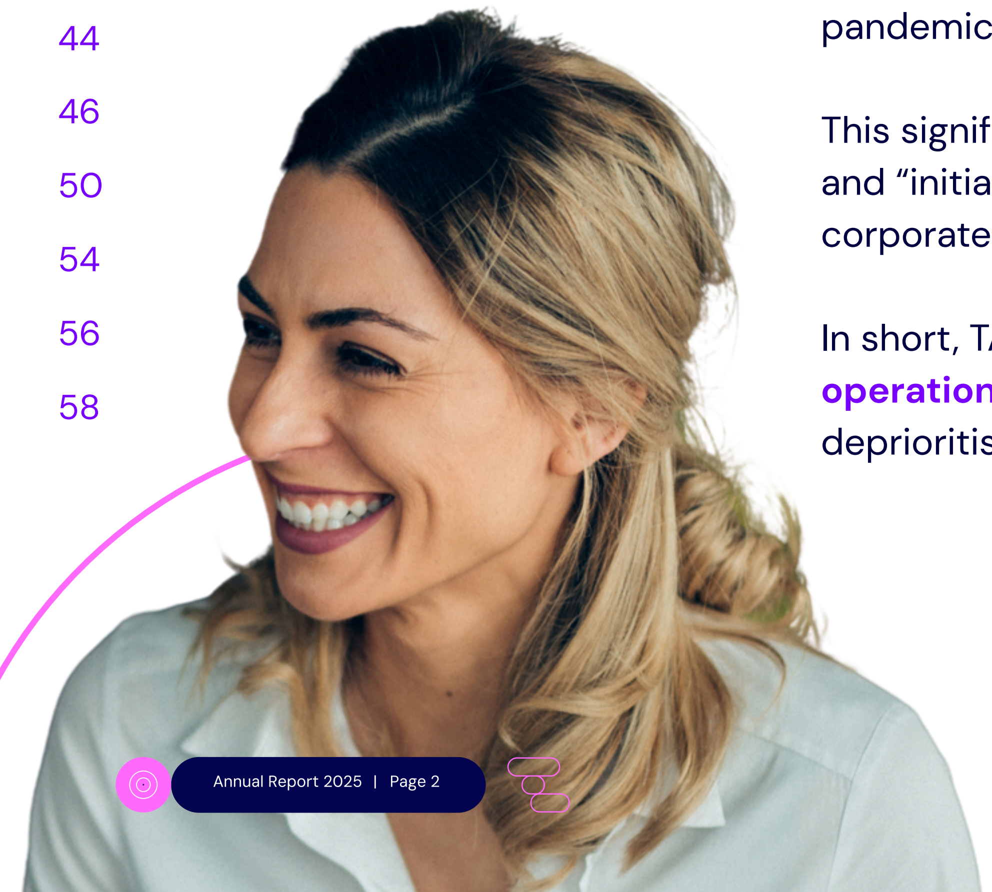


Executive Summary

Broader environmental challenges - such as the continuous growth of digital jobs, persistently high employment levels, and the rising importance of skills continue to shape today's talent industry.

Our 2025 survey confirms that Talent Acquisition (TA) teams are still being asked to do more with less in this climate. However, there has been a **notable shift within the Top 3 priorities** this year.

Candidate Experience, while still a critical focus, has been overtaken by **Automation & AI** as the number one priority for 2026.

In our latest data, **47%** of TA professionals selected **AI & Automation** among their top priorities (versus **18%** last year), reflecting the surge of interest in AI-driven efficiency.

Candidate experience ranked second (**44%**, down from **54%**), and **EVP & EB** held steady in third (**31%**, from **39%** previously).

Meanwhile, **ED&I** has fallen out of the top priorities, dropping from **35%** last year to just **12%** - its lowest level since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

This significant drop in ED&I emphasis may be linked to budget cuts and "initiative fatigue" - for instance, Forrester's research notes corporate diversity funding fell from 33% in 2022 to 27% in 2023.

In short, TA teams appear to be refocusing on **immediate operational challenges** (like workload and technology) and deprioritising longer-term culture initiatives like ED&I, at least for now.

Executive Summary
AI and Automation

After a shaky start over the past couple of years, this is the year that AI and Automation has really taken hold in the priorities of Talent Teams.

Almost half of all respondents **(48%)** noteed it as one of their top three priorities.

In last year's data just **18%** of respondents marked it as a priority, with many teams stepping back from the technology amid worries about its reliability.

This year, the marked recovery in this number comes with enthusiasm, with **77%** of respondents stating that they are optimistic AI tools will benefit TA teams in the long term.

Respondents noted a shift from 'playing' with AI to seriously implementing it – with most using the technology to make their teams more efficient, rather than for decision-making.

Of course, there's another side to AI that all recruiters will be familiar with: Candidates. Several respondents reported that too many candidates are using AI to apply, resulting in generic applications and, ultimately, wasted time.

Then there's the matter of governance. While teams push ahead with the use of new technologies to make them more efficient, only **20%** have a policy in place to govern AI's use in recruitment.

The data this year represents a nuanced view, with the enthusiasm for a new technology tempered with the realisation that *"the human element is still essential"*.

Executive Summary
Candidate Experience

Candidate Experience remains a top concern, and organisations are looking for ways to improve it even as teams are stretched.

61% of respondents currently use candidate or hiring-manager surveys to inform their recruitment processes – up from **46%** last year, indicating some progress in this area.

An additional **5%** plan to introduce candidate surveys in the next 12 months, and a further **14%** would like to use them. This appetite for feedback signals a growing recognition of candidate experience's impact on hiring outcomes.

At the same time, fewer TA teams have dedicated resources for candidate experience (only 19%, down from 25% last year), meaning recruiters must champion these initiatives on top of their already heavy workloads.

ManpowerGroup's latest Talent Shortage survey (2025) reports that the UK talent shortage sits at **76%**, down from it's peak of **80%** last year of employers struggling to fill roles. In this context, providing an excellent candidate journey can improve application rates, offer acceptance and even retention.

Measuring candidate experience (for example, via candidate Net Promoter Score) is becoming more popular, allowing TA teams to pinpoint improvements and demonstrate impact.

Executive Summary
EVP & Employer Brand

EVP & Employer Brand remains firmly in the spotlight as well, highlighted by 31% of respondents.

A quarter of organisations in our survey feel their employer brand does not reflect the current business, and **11%** admit they have no defined employer brand at all.

It's no surprise, then, that enhancing EVP/EB is a top priority for 2026.

A strong, authentic EVP helps organisations stand out in a talent-scarce market. Our respondents are heeding this call - though as the data shows, many EVPs are in need of an update (over one-third were launched 4+ years ago).

The opportunity lies in aligning the employer brand with what today's candidates value.

According to Randstad's 2025 Workmonitor, key factors influencing job decisions include an inclusive culture (**55%** of candidates won't join an employer lacking visible DE&I effort), career development opportunities (**72%** rate advancement as important), and crucially, work-life balance, with a record **82%** saying it was their top motivator, eclipsing pay for the first time ever.

Crafting an EVP that highlights these elements can significantly boost an organisation's appeal.

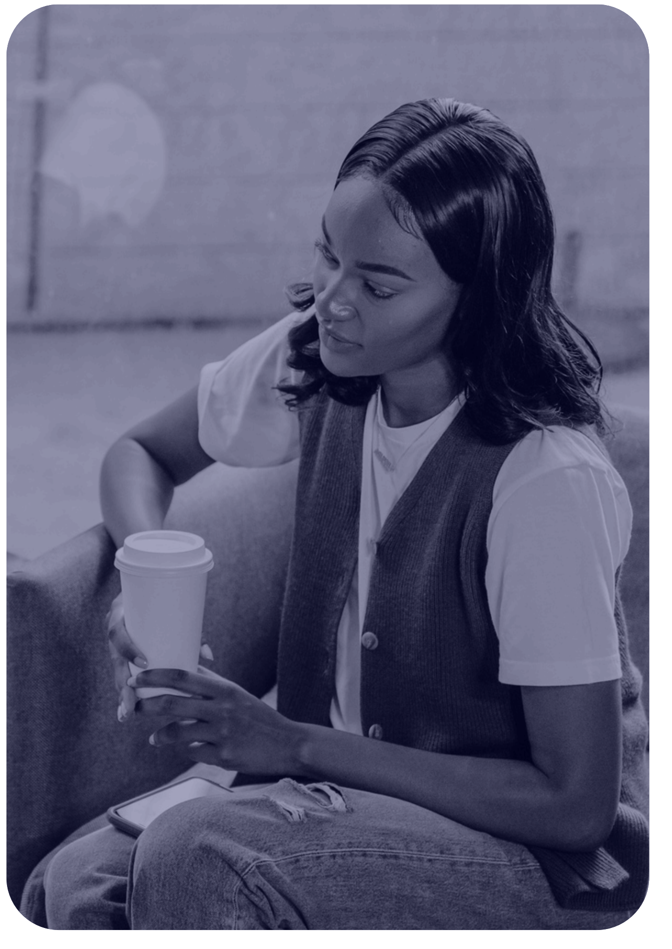
The priority for 2026 is to ensure the EVP is authentic and resonant with target talent audiences.

Organisations are looking to incorporate what matters most to candidates now - whether that's diversity and inclusion, flexible working, career growth opportunities, or social impact - into their employer brand.

Executive Summary
ED&I

It's worth noting that ED&I, while no longer top three, is still a notable priority for many (almost **12%** of respondents).

Many TA teams have moved ED&I from a strategic priority to more of a foundational element of their hiring approach. For instance, a significant number of organisations have instituted practices like gender-neutral job adverts (**47%** do so), diverse shortlists (**51%**), and disability-confident hiring programs **(42%)**.



In that sense, ED&I has become embedded in many TA processes even if it's not called out as an active "project" for the year ahead.

Nonetheless, the drop in explicit ED&I focus is a concerning trend. Budget constraints were cited as a culprit, and indeed outside research shows diversity program funding is falling.

TA leaders will need to ensure that, even if ED&I is not an official top initiative this year, progress on inclusion does not stall.

Given the known benefits of diverse teams, organisations that continue pushing forward on ED&I (even in subtle ways) will be better positioned long-term.

In summary, the top priorities for TA in 2025 reflect a balance of improving the people-side of recruiting (candidate and employee experience, employer brand) and leveraging technology and data (AI, automation, strategic use of platforms) to meet hiring goals efficiently.

TA teams are focusing on what they can control and improve internally – the experience they provide and the tools they use – to navigate an external environment that remains challenging.

Sources:
McKinsey & Co, 'Diversity Matters Even More' (December 2023)

Executive Summary

The Strategic Shift

Overall, the theme for 2026 is TA's desire to shift **from reactive service provider to strategic partner.**

Recruitment budgets are tightening, TA team sizes have shrunk, yet **74%** are handling more requisitions than optimal, with the average recruiter managing 11-20+ open roles simultaneously.

To meet their hiring goals under these constraints, TA teams are turning to four key strategies:

- **Embracing AI & Automation** to drive efficiency and reduce manual effort in sourcing and selection, while carefully managing the new risks that AI brings.
- **Leveraging Talent Pools & Employee Referrals** as low-cost, high-yield sources of hire when agency spend or job board advertising budgets are limited.
- **Investing in Strategic Workforce Planning,** so TA can anticipate skills needs and proactively build pipelines rather than relying on reactive agency hires - essentially doing more proactive recruitment with fewer resources.
- **Selective Outsourcing** of recruitment to scale capacity up or down without adding permanent headcount, though cost considerations mean outsourcing is used sparingly by most organisations.

The year-on-year comparisons tell a story of TA functions under strain, yet adapting creatively.

For example, last year 48% of organisations expected to expand their TA team; this year only **22%** hold that hope – but a large majority have adjusted expectations and anticipate headcount staying flat.

TA leaders are finding ways to deliver on hiring needs by prioritising what matters most (candidate experience, employer brand) and leveraging technology and workforce strategy to compensate for leaner teams and budgets.

As we move into 2026, TA teams will need to remain pragmatic, resilient and innovative – balancing speed and quality, championing the candidate and employee experience, and proving their strategic value to the business even when resources are limited.

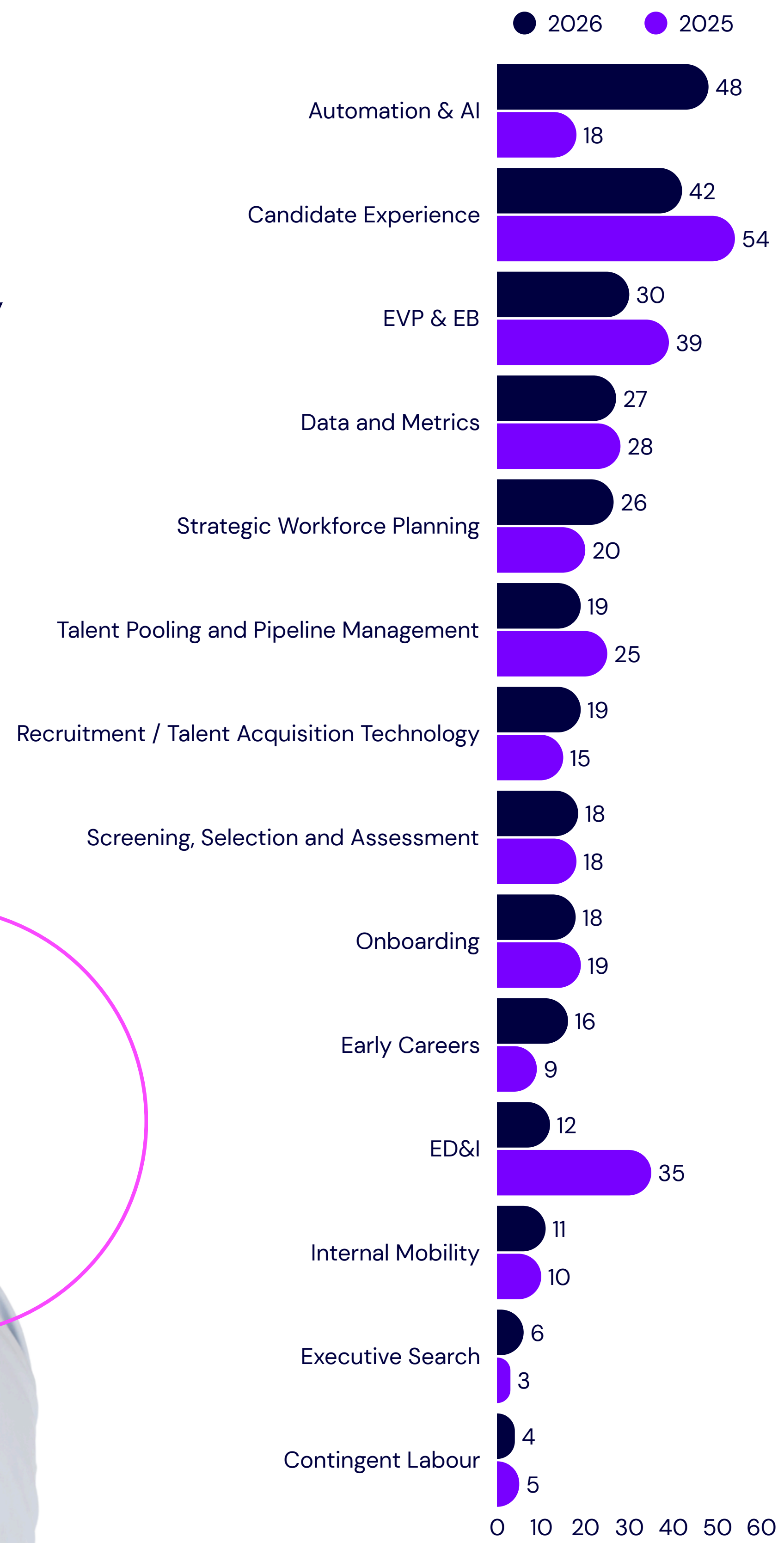
This report provides detailed insights into how TA functions are meeting these challenges and where opportunities lie for improvement in the coming year.

Top 3 priorities for 2026

The top three priorities for TA teams going into 2026 are: **Automation & AI, Candidate Experience, EVP & Employer Branding.**

This top 3 represents a significant shift from last year's, with Automation & AI has surging into the top tier as a priority for **almost half** of respondents, replacing ED&I.

We examine each of these priorities in turn, including their prevalence and what's driving them.



Automation & AI (48%)
AI and automation have surged into the top priorities for 2025, with two in five TA teams now focusing on them. This jump reflects both hype and genuine need, as TA teams are pressured to "do more with less."

Popular use cases include chatbots, interview scheduling and AI-driven screening. Long-term optimism is high **(77%)**, yet actual usage has dipped slightly since last year as early adopters reassess results.

Governance remains limited, with only **30%** having an AI policy. Despite caution around bias, applicant volume and preserving the "human element," teams see clear opportunities to automate low-value tasks so recruiters can focus on relationships and stakeholder management.

Candidate Experience (42%)
Candidate experience remains a leading priority, though slightly less dominant than last year (now **44%** vs. **54%**).

61% now use candidate or hiring-manager feedback to shape processes (up from **46%**), with another **14%** planning to introduce surveys.

Resourcing is a challenge: just **19%** have a dedicated owner for candidate experience, down from **25%.**

Organisations that get this right – simple applications, fast communication, respectful treatment – see higher conversion rates, stronger pipelines and improved quality of hire. Correspondingly, tracking candidate experience as a metric has risen to **48%.**

EVP & Employer Branding (30%)
Employer brand remains in the top 3, with over a quarter **(27%)** saying their brand no longer reflects their business, and **1 in 10** lack a formal employer brand altogether.

While **50%** refreshed their EVP/EB in the past year, many remain outdated; with **12%** 4+ years old.

TA teams aim to ensure their EVP is authentic and aligned with what candidates now value, supported by external evidence that over **50%** of HR leaders plan EVP enhancements.

ED&I

Although no longer top three, **ED&I** remains embedded: **68%** use gender-neutral job ads and **28%** mandate diverse shortlists.

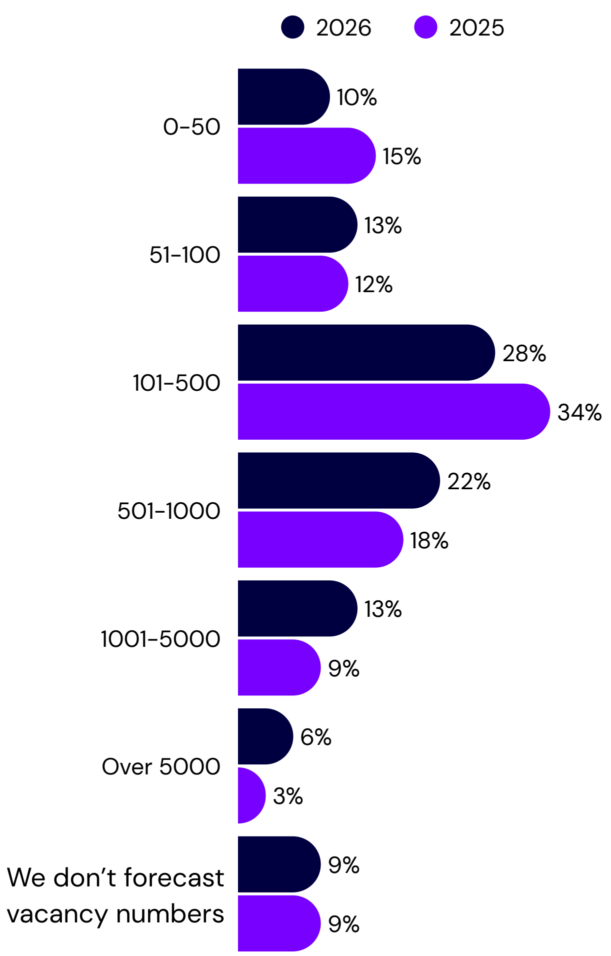
Budget pressures in this area along with recent political discourse presents a risk of slowing progress.

Vacancy and Budget Forecasting

Hiring expectations for the year ahead remain subdued and largely unchanged. Around **53%** of respondents expect to fill 500 or fewer roles by the end of 2025, with a similar proportion forecasting the same for 2026.

A small but growing share of organisations aren't forecasting hiring volumes at all (**9%,** up from **5%**), signalling increased uncertainty and creating challenges for TA teams trying to plan resources effectively.

Expected roles 2025 vs 2026



Year-on-year recruitment outlooks have also cooled. Only **7%** expect a significant increase in hiring, compared with **18%** last year.

The most common view, held by **37%,** is that hiring will "remain about the same," up from **31%** a year ago. Fewer organisations expect a small decrease in activity (**19%**), and similar number anticipate a modest rise (**20%**).

Overall, the consensus is that recruitment will stay steady heading into 2026: not declining sharply, but lacking the optimistic growth some predicted last year.

Many TA leaders note that requisition loads are stable but not rebounding to pre-2023 levels, resulting in a manageable, steady pace of hiring after the post-pandemic surge.

Compared with broader benchmarks, TA leaders appear slightly more cautious.

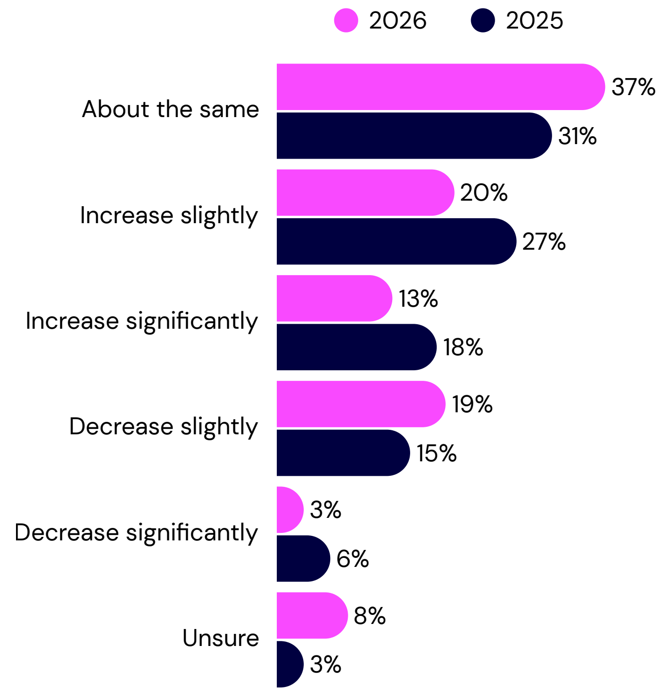
ManpowerGroup's Q3 2024 global Net Employment Outlook (NEO) was **+22%,** whereas our survey data produces an equivalent NEO of around **+17%.**

This likely reflects the industries and geographies represented, particularly UK-based organisations and sectors like non-profits and public services, where hiring is typically more constrained.

Budget sentiment reinforces this cautious environment. Recruitment budgets have tightened notably compared to last year.

Only **12%** report a TA budget above £1m (down from **19%**), while **57%** operate under £1m. Nearly a third (**29%**) have less than £250k, up sharply from **21%.**

Expected hiring volume 2025 vs 2026

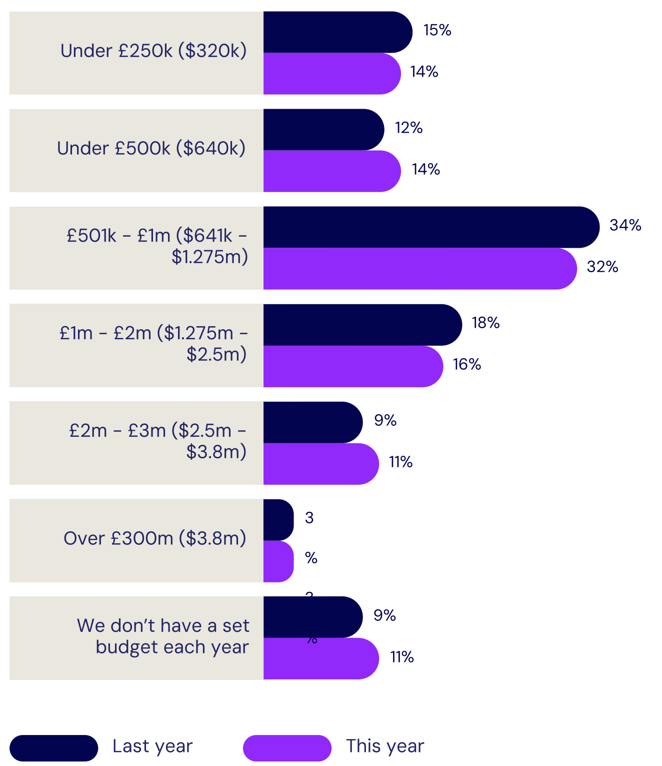


The share with no set recruitment budget has also risen to **30%,** suggesting spend is either decentralised or being squeezed.

Economic uncertainty, sector-specific slowdowns, and cost-cutting measures are driving these shifts. Reduced budgets are prompting TA teams to scale back agency use, delay technology investments and focus on efficiency.

Cost-per-hire is now tracked by **63%** (up from **41%**), reflecting increased financial scrutiny.

The challenge for TA leaders is clear: achieve impact with leaner budgets while maintaining quality and pace of hire.



TA Teams and Their Capabilities

Team size, structure and capacity

TA team sizes have stabilised after several years of contraction, with some organisations even reporting modest growth; however, small teams still dominate.

In this year's survey, **67%** of respondents work in TA teams of fewer than 10 people, slightly lower than last year's **71%**, but still signalling lean structures.

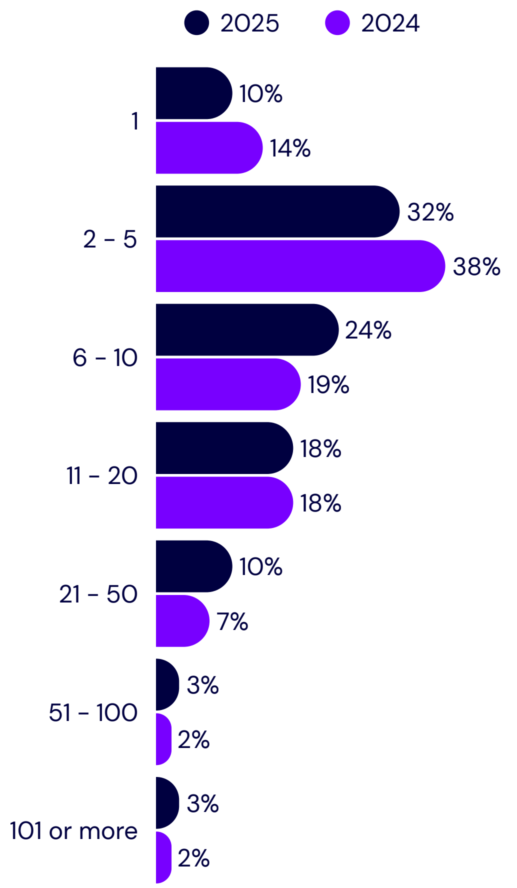
Solo recruiters remain common: **10.5%** operate as a one-person TA team, down from **14%** but still significant.

Conversely, **16%** now work in teams of 21 or more (up from **11%**), suggesting some larger organisations have rebuilt TA capability. The majority fall between 2–20 team members.

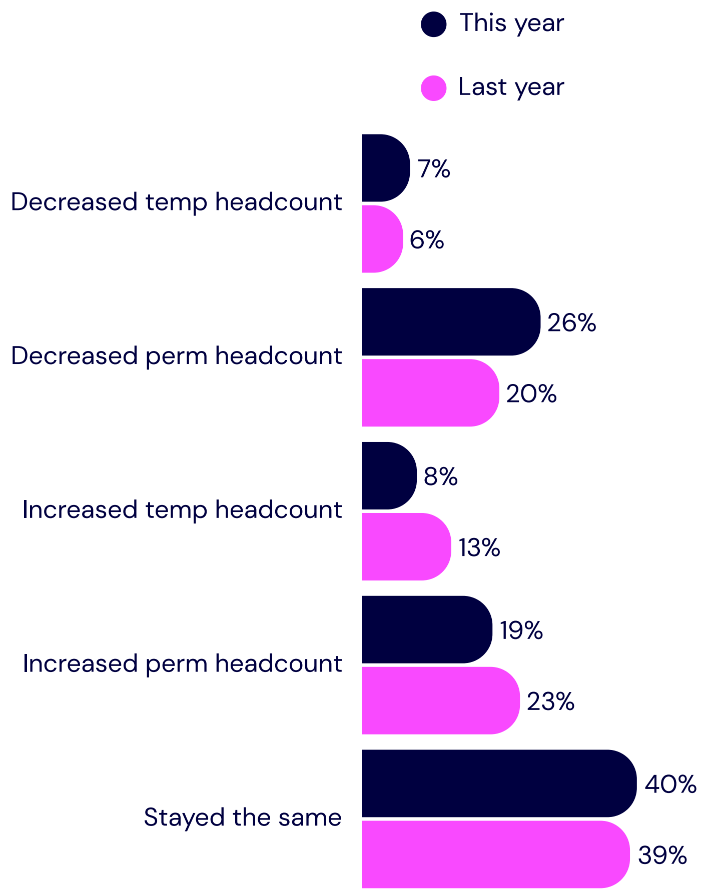
When asked about year-on-year change, **39%** reported no movement in team size, reflecting the broader "steady state" sentiment in hiring volumes. A third (**34%**) experienced decreases in TA headcount and **26%** saw increases.

Notably, fewer teams grew this year than last (**26%** vs. **36%** previously, and **48%** the year before). This suggests a reversal of post-pandemic rebuilding: expansion has slowed, and some teams have faced cuts, including **8%** losing temporary recruiters and **27%** losing permanent headcount.

TA team size 2024 vs 2025



TA team size changes 2024 vs 2025



With fewer recruiters, requisition loads have risen (covered later in Workload). Looking forward, optimism remains somewhat muted.

Only **22%** expect their TA team to grow in the next 12 months, an increase from last year's extremely low **17%**, but far below the **34%** who expected growth two years ago.

Meanwhile, **61%** anticipate team size will stay flat, and around **10%** expect reductions. Uncertainty has also dropped slightly (**7%** "don't know"), suggesting teams have reached a new baseline.

Several respondents noted that prior hopes of adding headcount "have not been realised," and expectations are now more realistic. Most TA functions must continue operating at current capacity, with little relief ahead.

Specialisation and Scope

We asked whether TA teams have dedicated specialists across areas like Employer Branding, Sourcing, Data & Insights, Early Careers, and Candidate Experience.

The results show that specialists are becoming rarer and generalists more common, as budget constraints force teams to broaden roles.

The most commonly specialised functions are:

- Employer Branding: **39%** have dedicated EB resources (down from **44%** last year and **50%** the year before).
- Data & Analytics: **41%** have a data/insights specialist (flat year-on-year).
- Contingent/Temp Hiring: **40%**

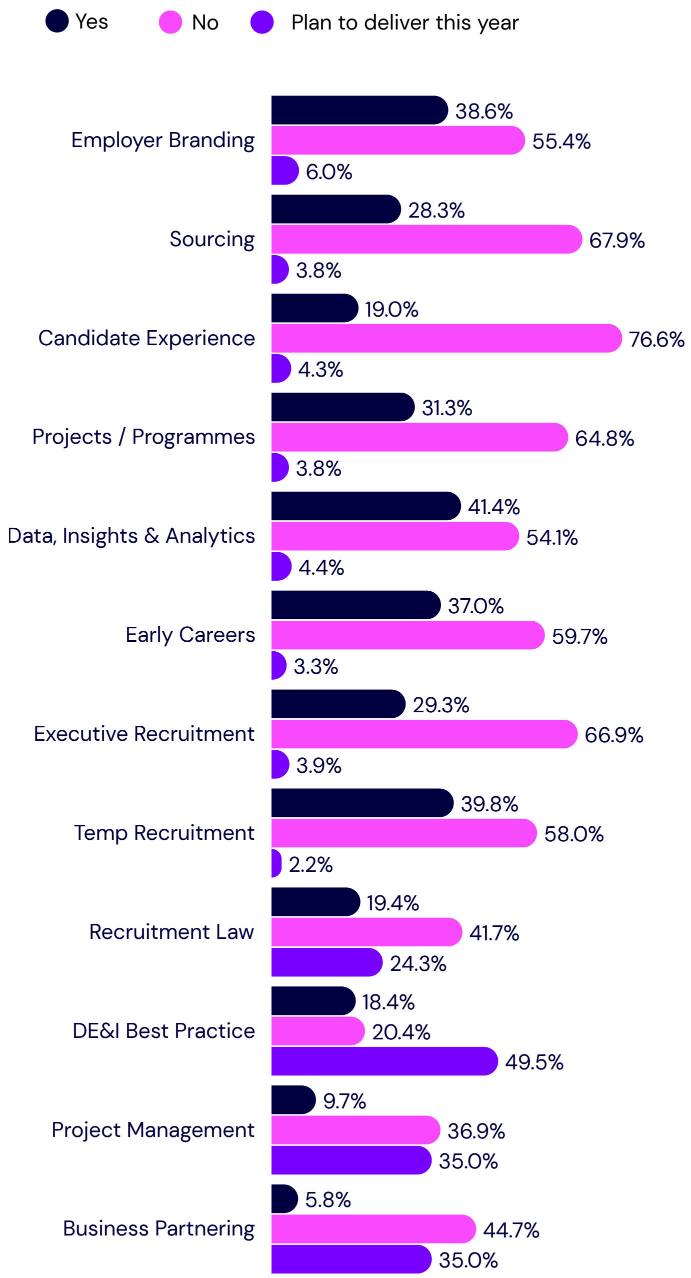
Other functions are less likely to have dedicated owners:

- Projects/Programmes: **31%** (down from **35%**).
- Early Careers: **37%** (up from **27%** last year, but previously over **50%**).
- Executive Recruitment: **29%.**
- Sourcing: **28%** have dedicated sourcers.
- Candidate Experience: **19%** (down from **25%**).

Most percentages dropped year-on-year, indicating a trend: work previously handled by specialists has been absorbed into hybrid or generalist TA roles.

Respondents noted concerns that these focus areas are suffering without dedicated attention. While multi-hat roles can promote a holistic view of recruiting, capacity pressures are real, and strategic initiatives risk stalling.

Specialisms within TA functions 2025



Outsourcing

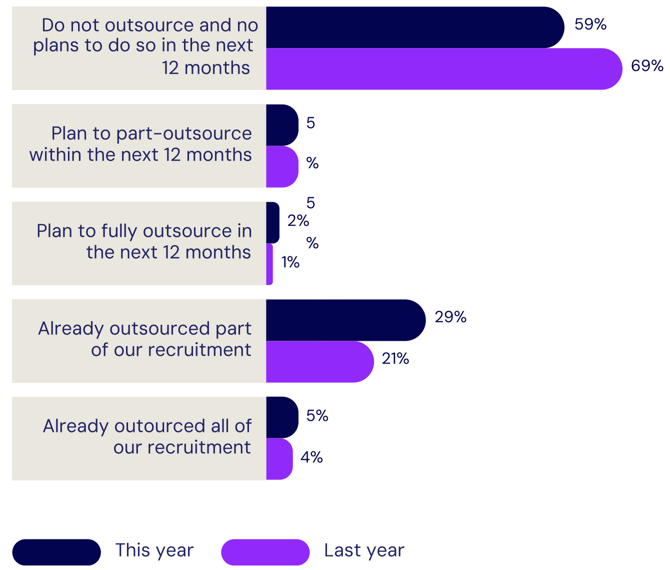
Only **18%** of organisations currently outsource some or all of their recruitment, down from **25%** last year, despite broader industry predictions of RPO growth.

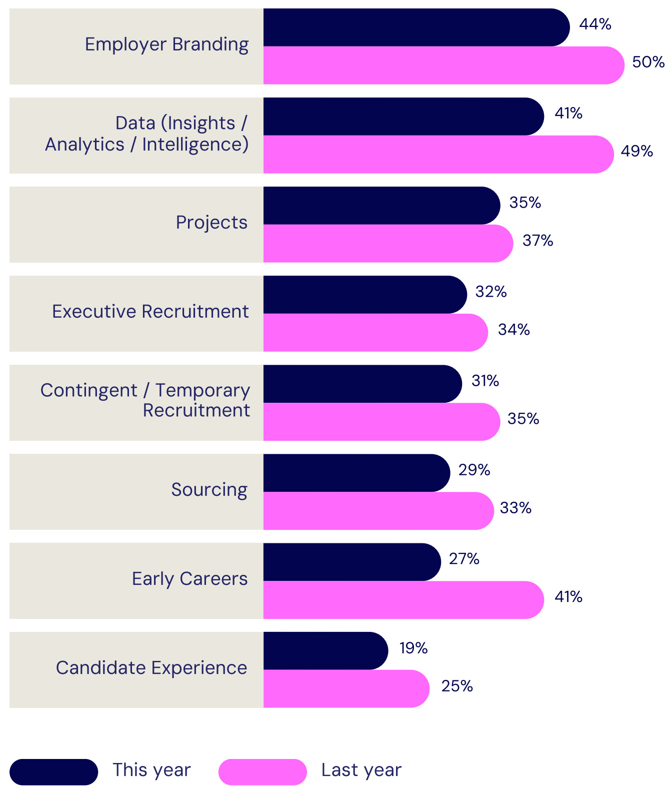
Of these, around **17%** use partial outsourcing (e.g., for volume spikes or hard-to-fill roles) and just **1%** fully outsource recruitment.

A further **9%** are considering outsourcing within the next year. However, **72%** neither outsource nor plan to, suggesting strong preference for in-house TA.

The decline from last year might reflect the sample composition or a pullback driven by cost concerns and lower hiring volumes. Several respondents noted that outsourcing is often viewed as **"too expensive unless essential."**

This suggests that while RPO may be growing in larger enterprises or different geographies, many organisations represented here remain cautious.





Workload

Workloads have increased again, consistent with smaller teams and steady vacancy levels.

Currently, **74%** of TA professionals manage 11+ open roles at any given time (up from **69%**). A sizable **38%** handle 21+ requisitions, compared with **31%** last year.

Only **26%** operate with 10 or fewer open roles, down from **31%**. This heavy workload contrasts sharply with what TA leaders consider to be the optimal workload of 10 or fewer (**42%**).

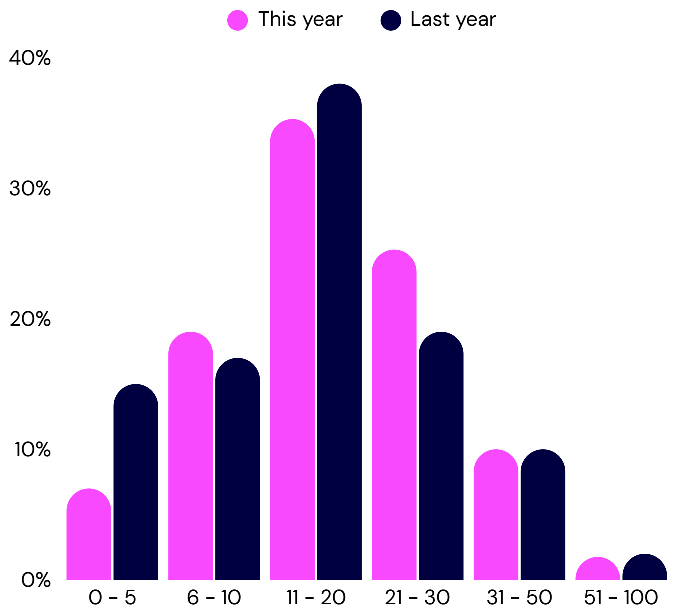
Only **24%** say that 21+ roles could ever be optimal but **38%** are operating at that load.

These gaps highlight structural strain, contributing to slower hiring, reduced sourcing quality, reliance on easier channels, and heightened burnout risk.

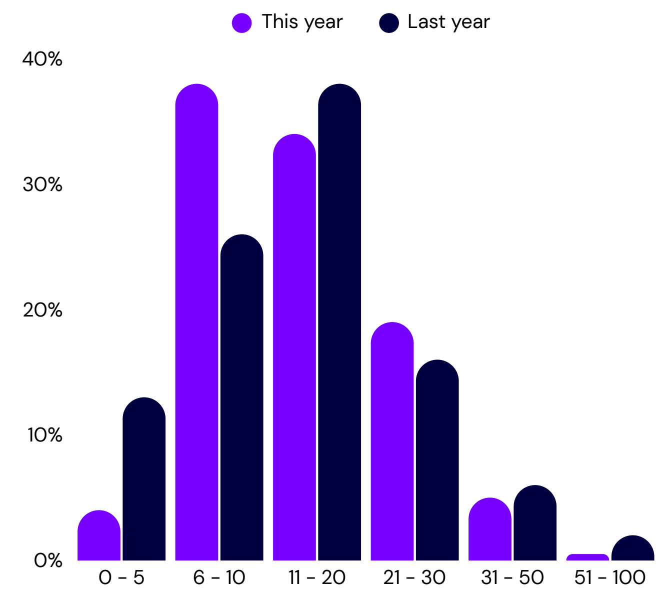
For recruiters handling 11–20 roles (**35%** of respondents), expectations and reality are more in alignment, with **34%** considering this range optimal. But the extremes (under 10 or over 20) are where capacity issues intensify.

Many TA leaders flagged concerns about overburdening teams, with several linking this directly to capability gaps and rising turnover.

What is the average workload in your organisation? (# of roles)



What is the optimum workload? (# of roles)



Capabilities and skills gaps

TA capability perceptions are mixed, with teams admitting they don't have everything they need.

Only **23%** feel their team has all the capabilities needed (down from **32%**), but **71%** say they have some but not all (up from **64%**), and **5%** say they lack necessary capabilities entirely, doen from **8%** last year.

Three capability areas dominate concerns: Technology (**70%**), Recruiter Skills (**48%**) and Budget (**46%**)

That teams are finding their Technology skills lacking is perhaps no surprise, given the swift and sudden rise of generative AI technology.

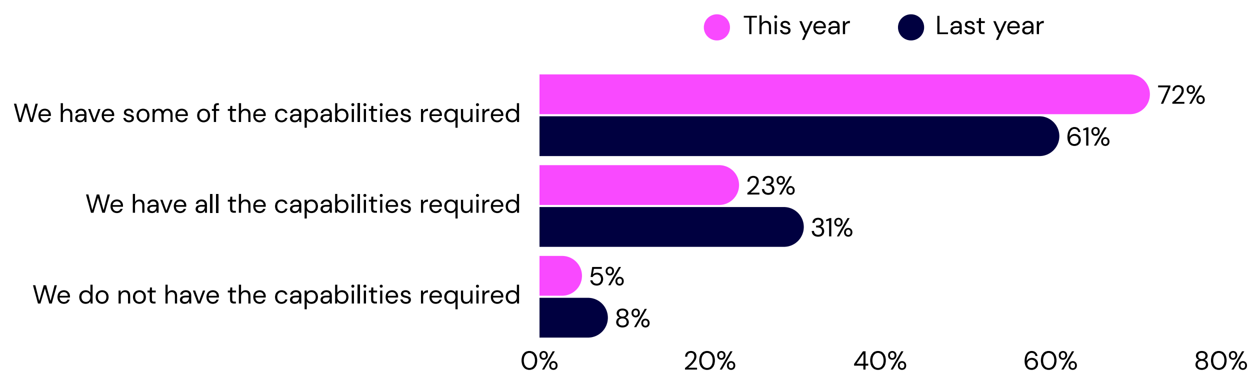
Investing in upskilling teams in technology, solid recruiter foundational training, as well as more general skills like budget management will be crucial to meet the challenges of 2026 and beyond.

Recruiter capability gaps also emerged in strategic partnering, advanced sourcing, recruitment marketing, and effective use of TA technology.

More than half of organisations worry their recruiters lack skills needed for some parts of the role, an issue made more urgent by rising workloads and reduced access to specialists.

Capability issues are distributed across both sides of the recruitment partnership. Hiring managers commonly need support in interviewing skills, assessment design, candidate engagement, and ED&I.

Recruiters more often need development in proactive sourcing, tech adoption, data literacy, and employer branding.



Capabilities and skills gaps

Several respondents highlighted that smaller team sizes are themselves a capability constraint: lacking enough people means lacking certain skills. Others flagged sector-specific challenges, such as recruiting for highly specialised technical roles.

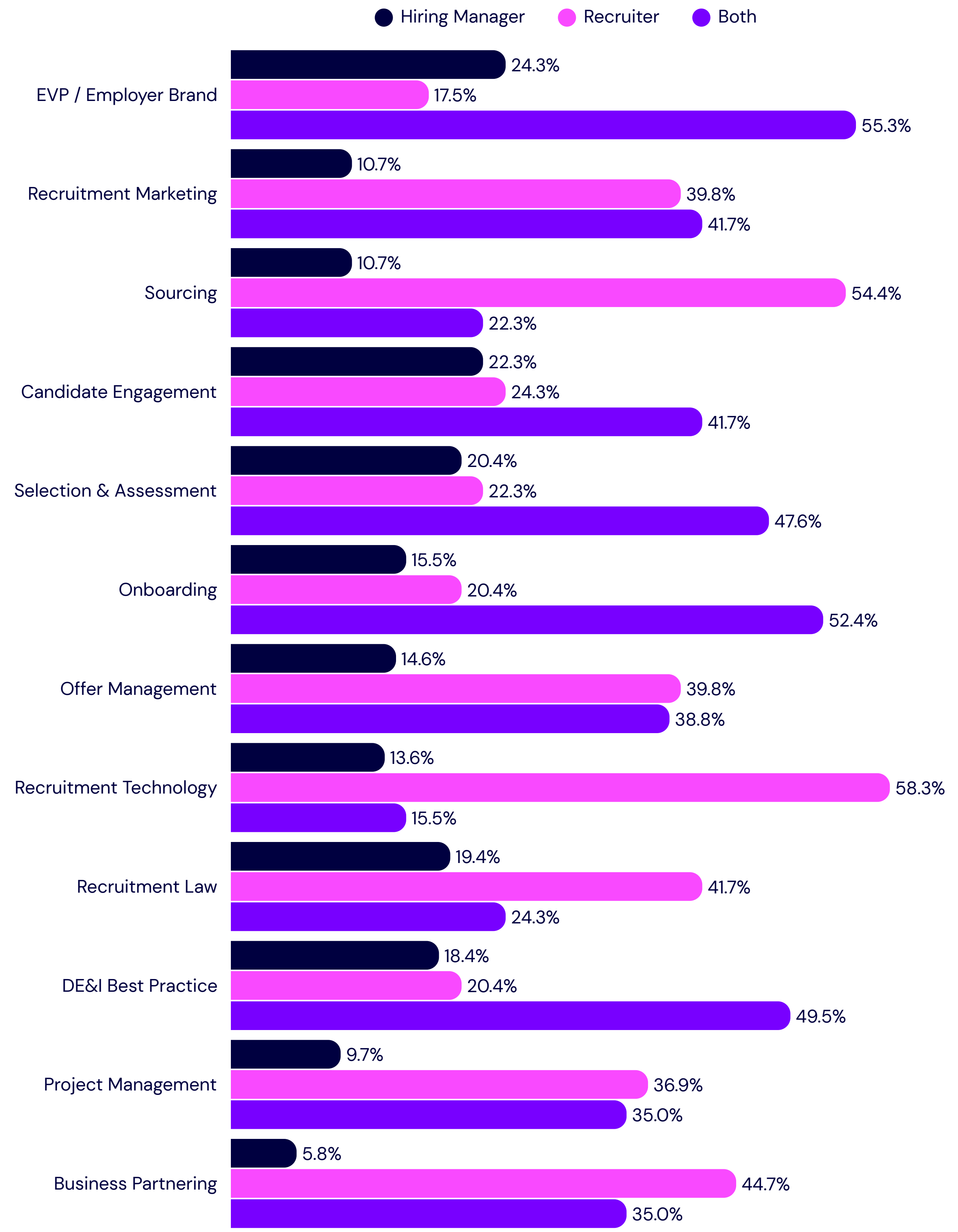
The overall takeaway: TA teams require significant investment in capability-building for both recruiters and hiring managers. With limited headcount growth expected, upskilling is becoming a critical lever for maintaining performance.

In summary, today's TA teams are lean, broadly scoped and under pressure. Team growth has slowed, specialist roles are diminishing, outsourcing remains limited, and workloads continue to rise.

Combined with widening capability gaps, especially in Technology, Recruiter Skills and Hiring Manager Capability - TA functions must work smarter and focus on upskilling to maintain effectiveness.

The upcoming sections will explore how teams are adapting in sourcing, attraction, measurement, and technology to manage these persistent capacity constraints.

With whom do your capability concerns lie?



Attraction and Sourcing

Organisations continue to use a broad mix of talent attraction programmes, but clear shifts show a move toward skills-based early talent pipelines and away from more traditional, credential-heavy schemes.

Apprenticeships remain the most widely offered programme (**64%**, up from **61%**), signalling sustained and growing investment in skills-first development pathways. Work experience placements stayed broadly flat at **36%** (from **37%**), as organisations work hard to maintain their commitments.

Internship programmes remain common at **40%**, though notably lower than last year's **48%.**

This may reflect resource prioritisation, as apprenticeships often offer better long-term return given their structured nature and tend to convert to permanent roles.

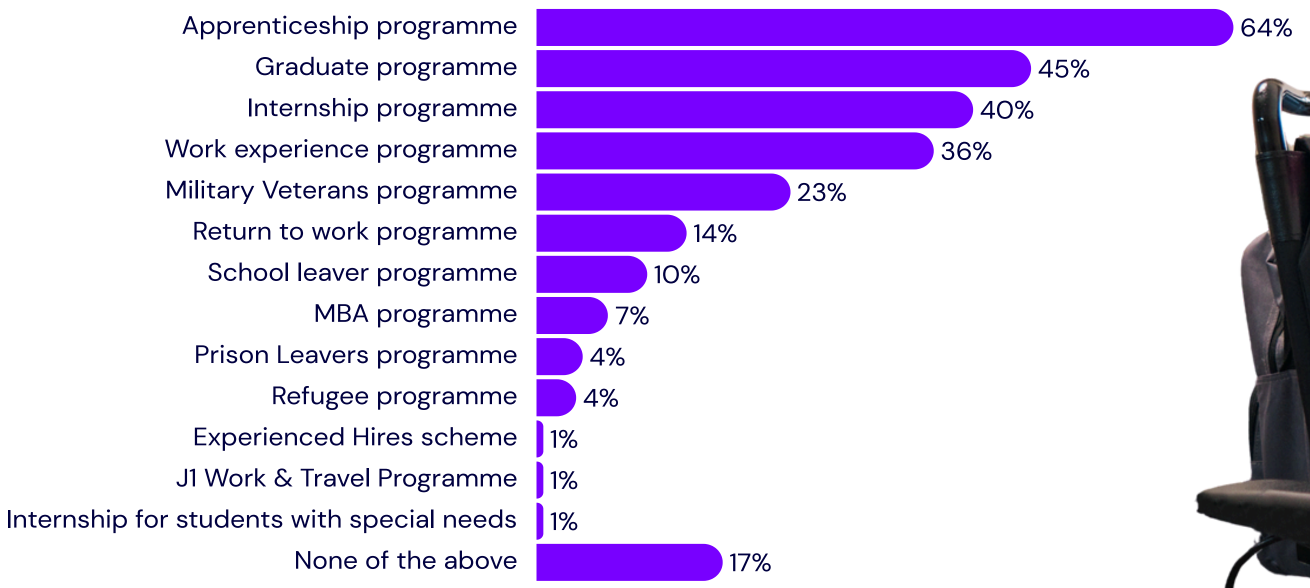
More traditional graduate trainee schemes held steady year-on-year with **45%** offering one. Military veteran programmes s declined slightly from **27%** to **23%.**

These numbers suggest a continued investment in early career talent which is perhaps increasingly important given the new skills that will be needed as technology advances.

Meanwhile, programmes targeting specific underrepresented groups remain very rare. Few organisations have structured initiatives for refugees, prison leavers or MBA hires, and interest has stagnated or fallen.

Overall, organisations appear to be doubling down on core, practical, established early-talent channels while reducing investment in more specialised initiatives.

Which of the following does your organisation currently have in place?



Referral Schemes

Employee referrals remain nearly universal, but their contribution to total hires has dropped. This year, **71%** of organisations say referrals account for **20%** or less of total hires (up from **63%**). Within that, **48%** say referrals make up under **10%.**

Around **5%** report that referrals contribute roughly a third of hires, compared with **13%** last year.

18% of organisations don't have a referral scheme at all, and **5%** don't track the percentage of hires that come through it.

Referrals are being used, but they are yielding proportionately fewer hires than last year.

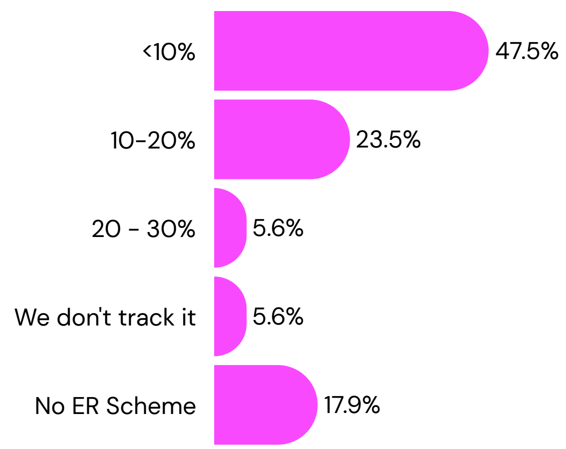
Possible reasons include:

- Employees referring fewer contacts due to perceived market uncertainty.
- Reduced referral bonuses.
- Hybrid/remote working leading to weaker day-to-day interactions that inspire referrals.
- Increased reliance on other channels diluting the share referrals contribute.

Given referrals' historically strong performance in retention, cultural fit, and cost efficiency, this downward trend is a concern.

Many organisations may need to refresh their referral messaging, reposition incentives, or embed referral prompts more explicitly into internal communications.

What percentage of your hires come from your employee referral scheme?



Agency Usage

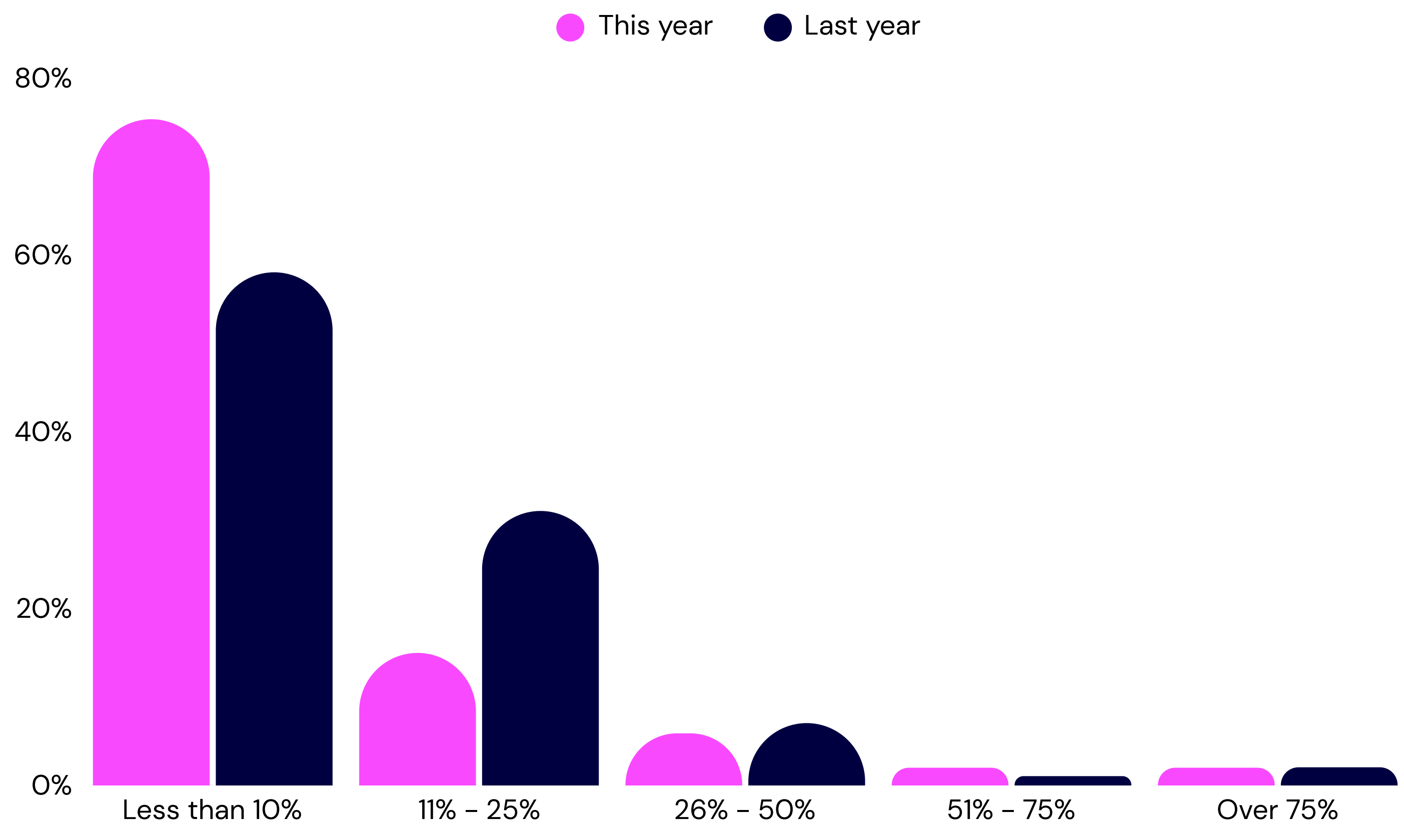
Agency dependence continues to fall. **75%** of organisations filled less than **10%** of their vacancies through agencies – up dramatically from **58%** last year.

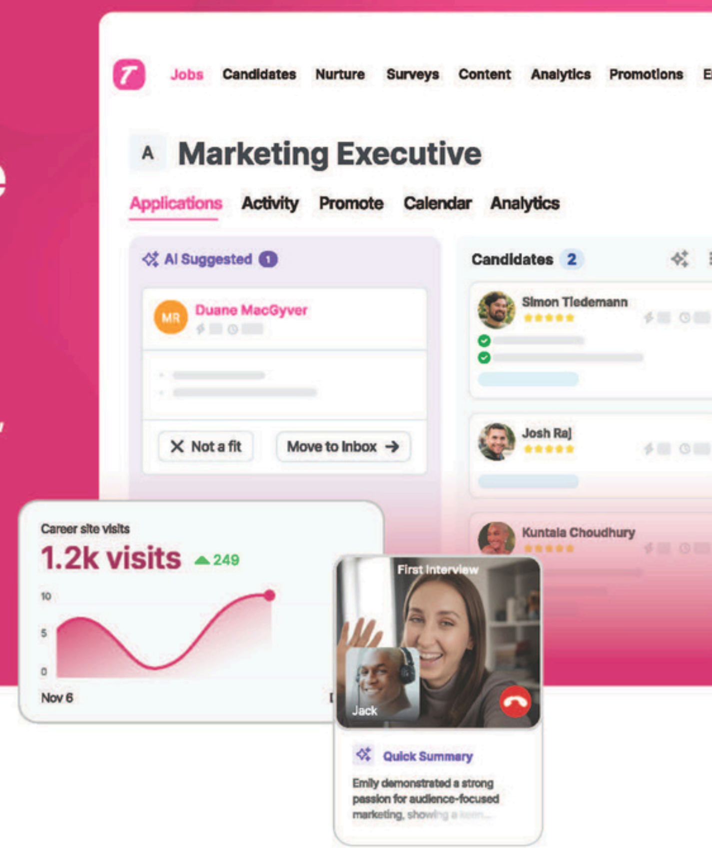
Only around **8%** used agencies for more than a quarter of their hires (similar to last year's already-low figures), and just **2%** used agencies for more than half.

The data confirms a sustained shift towards in-house delivery, as organisations choose to manage hiring themselves to reduce costs and improve ownership.

Internal TA teams are taking on more direct sourcing: leveraging job boards, LinkedIn, and internal networks, and only turning to agencies for niche roles or where capability gaps persist.

However, this pushes more workload onto already constrained TA teams and increases pressure to build sourcing capability internally.





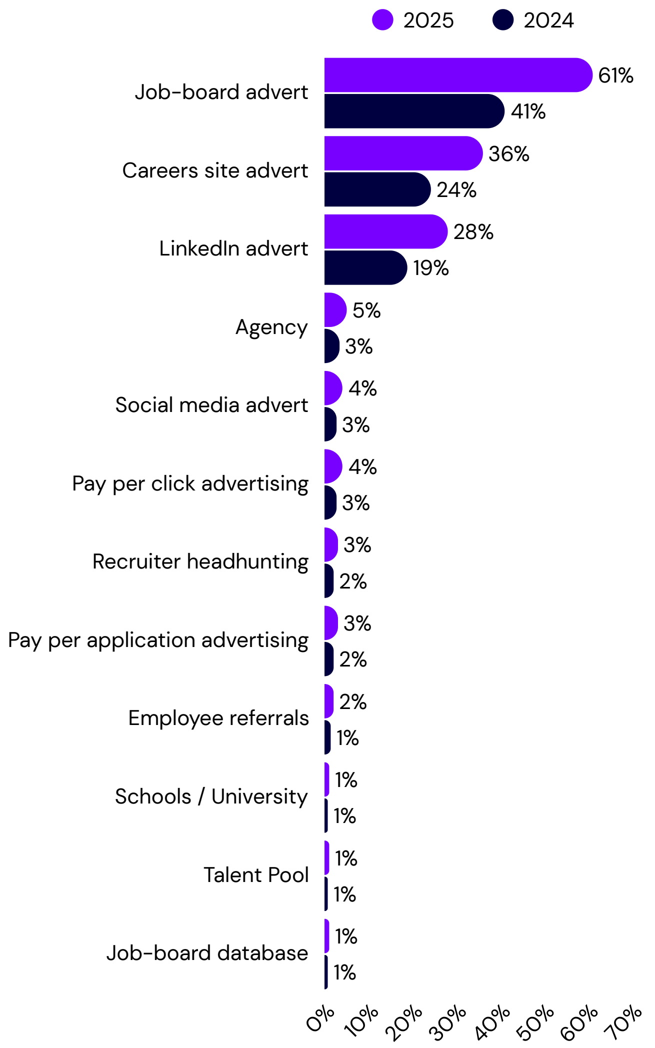
Volume Recruitment

The top-performing channels for volume roles remain job boards and company career sites. This year:
Job boards account for **41%** of volume hires (the #1 source).

Career site adverts account for **24%**, taking second place.

LinkedIn adverts rose to around **19%** as volume source #3.

Where do most of your Volume Recuitment hires come from?



Social media (outside of LinkedIn), despite being used by the majority of organisations for volume hiring, saw declining effectiveness, dropping from **9%** to **4%** of hires. Usage increased, but yield fell, implying inefficiencies in social targeting, reduced candidate engagement or the impact of AI.

Recruiter headhunting and agencies contribute small percentages to volume roles, reflecting that bulk entry-level hiring is typically driven by inbound applicant flow rather than specialist sourcing.

Early Careers

Early careers hiring also shows a shift toward company-owned digital channels:

- Career site adverts: **33%** (now the #1 early careers source)
- Job boards: **28%** (close second)
- Schools / Universities: **17%**

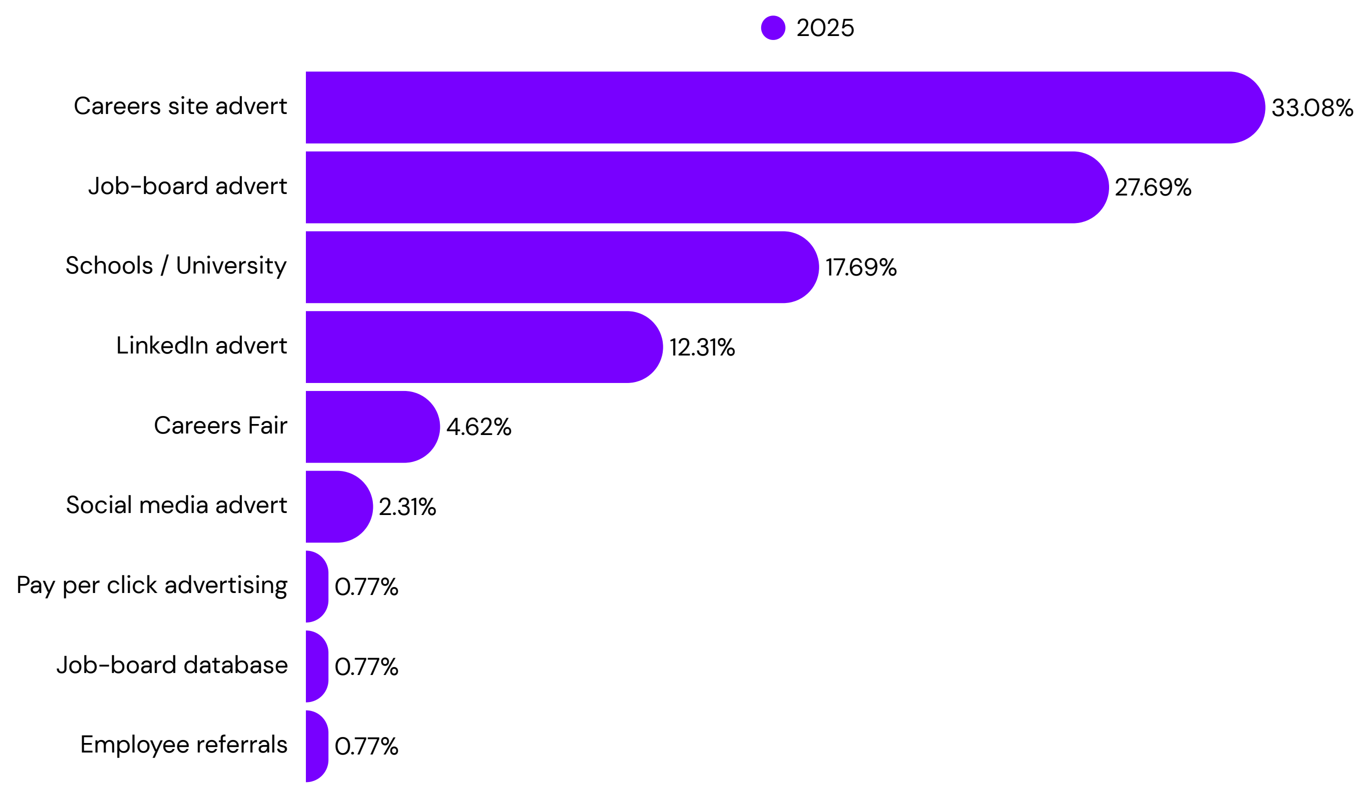
While **85%** of organisations still use schools/universities for outreach, the proportion of hires coming through these channels has dropped significantly.

This may reflect reduced graduate intakes or shifts in early-talent behaviour: many are finding roles via job boards and careers sites rather than campus channels.

Traditional early-career channels such as agencies, offline ads or CV databases saw further declines in use, as recruiters consolidate efforts into fewer channels.

Organisations are increasingly focusing on a smaller, proven set of channels for student and graduate hiring.

Where do most of your Early Careers hires come from?



Experienced Hires

At the experienced level, job postings have overtaken headhunting and LinkedIn is dominant:

- LinkedIn adverts: **40%** of experienced hires
- Careers site adverts: **19%**
- Job board adverts: **17%**

This signals a change from previous years, where headhunting was more prominent (now just **14%**.)

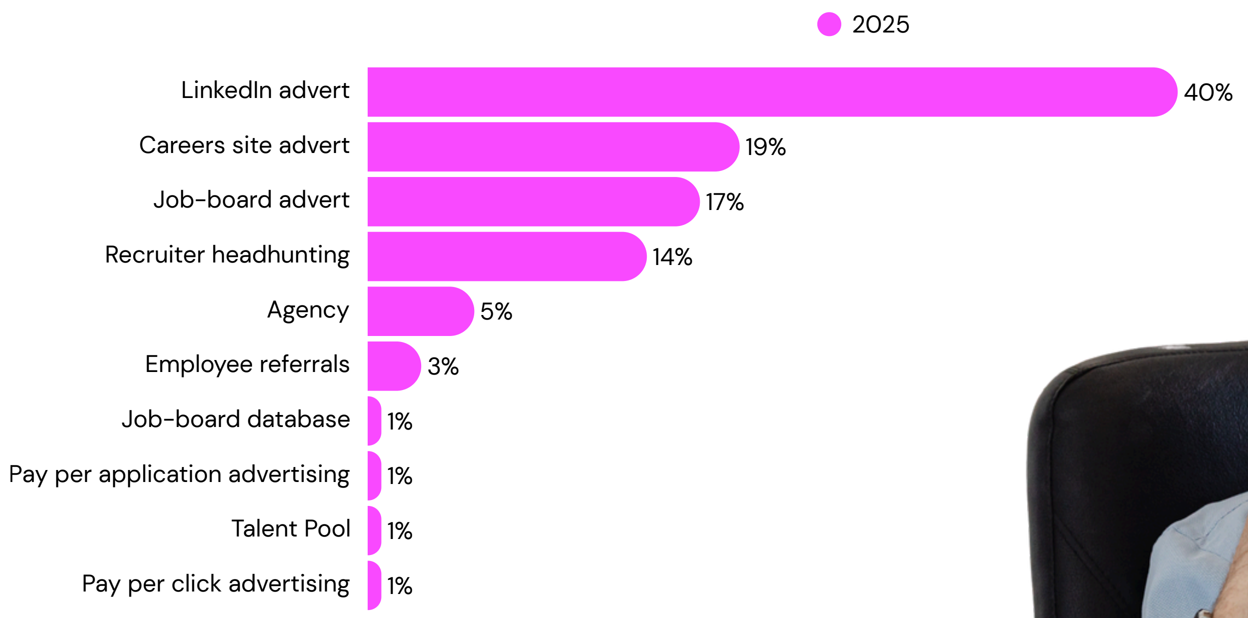
The switch may reflect that professionals became more active job seekers during a turbulent job market, reducing the need for outbound sourcing.

Conversely, high recruiter workloads may have limited capacity for headhunting, directing more experienced candidates toward self-application routes.

Referrals, talent pools, and programmatic job-board advertising (pay-per-click/pay-per-application) all remain relatively minor channels.

Agencies are still used in limited cases but are not top drivers of experienced hiring.

Where do most of your Experienced Hires come from?



Executive Recruitment

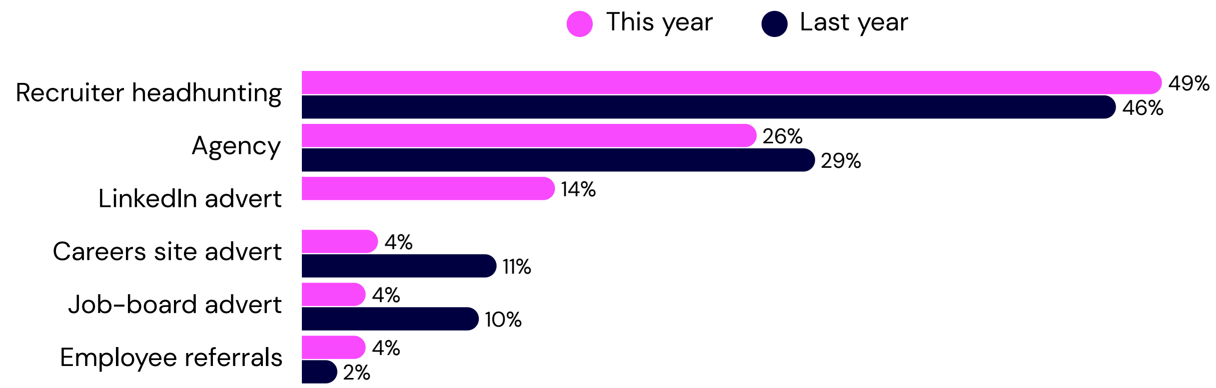
Executive recruitment continues to rely heavily on high-touch channels:

- Recruiter headhunting is the #1 source, delivering **49%** of exec hires, up from **46%** last year.
- Agencies fill **26%** (down slightly)
- LinkedIn is the third largest contributor at **14%**, which was completely absent from last year's results - even though LinkedIn was widely used as a channel.

Employee referrals have risen slightly, but the fall in other job board success indicates that LinkedIn is consolidating much of this volume.

TA teams appear to be leveraging lower-cost internal channels more effectively while still relying on search firms for strategic hires.

What is your most successful channel for Executive Recuitment



Social Media

Social media remains a core part of the TA toolkit for sourcing talent and promoting employer brand.

While several platforms are used, LinkedIn continues to dominate, both in adoption and perceived effectiveness, with other platforms playing more supplementary or experimental roles.

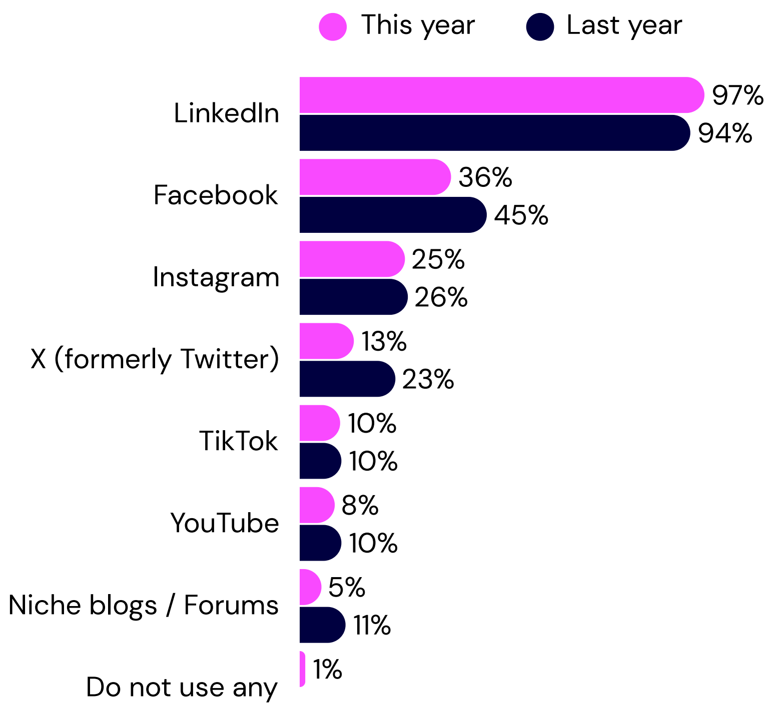
LinkedIn is used by **97%** of respondents (up slightly from **94%**), making it essentially universal. Given its reach, professional focus, and integrated recruitment tools, it remains the central social channel for job posting, headhunting, outreach and employer brand content.

The continued rise suggests even late adopters now recognise that meaningful talent competition requires a strong LinkedIn presence.

Facebook and Instagram remain the next most commonly used platforms, but at much lower rates. **36%** use Facebook for TA (down from **45%**), while **25%** use Instagram (unchanged).

Facebook's slight decline likely reflects demographic shifts as its audience skews older, and a possible reduction in investment. Instagram holds steady as a visual employer branding channel, especially for early-career talent.

Which social media channels do you use?



The use of X / Twitter has seen a notable decline, down 10 percentage points from **23%** last year to just **13%** this year, reflecting the changing nature of that platform.

TikTok's adoption remains flat at **10%,** signalling that employers haven't yet got to grips with how to use this channel to engage with Gen Z.

Other channels used far less included Snapchat, Github and Pinterest, with just **1%** of respondents not using any social media at all.

Overall, platform choice aligns closely with candidate behaviour:

- LinkedIn for professionals
- Facebook for community reach and hourly roles
- Instagram/TikTok for visual storytelling and younger audiences.

TikTok's continued usage signals increasing interest in video-led recruiting, particularly for younger demographics. While it is yet to show any solid metrics of effectiveness, qualitative insights suggest it remains more of an employer brand engagement tool than a hire-driving channel.

Organisations are experimenting with behind-the-scenes content, employee stories, or job-related challenges, but few report substantial hire volumes.

Snapchat and X remain niche, and neither shows signs of becoming core TA channels. Their usage reflects targeted or experimental strategies rather than consistent recruiting pipelines.

Social Media

When asked which platform delivers the **strongest** recruitment results, LinkedIn is overwhelmingly dominant: **92%** named it the most effective social platform for supporting recruitment strategy.

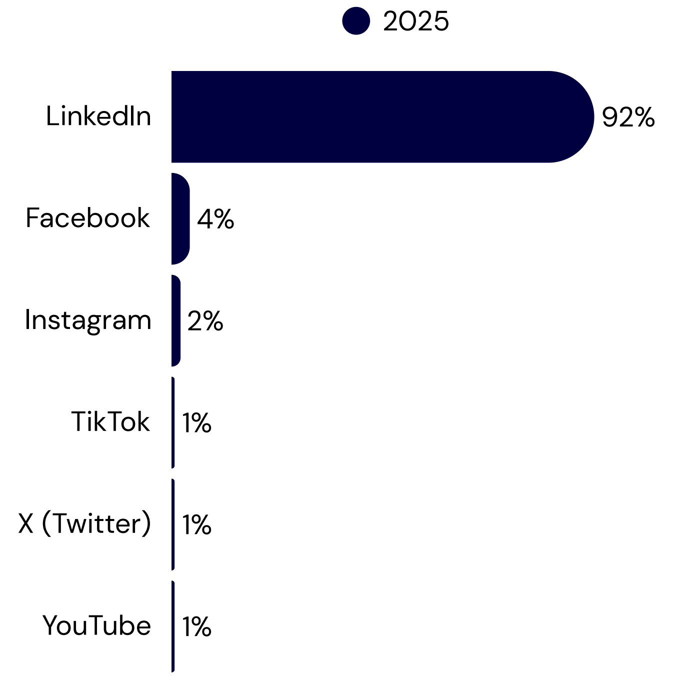
This aligns with both its near-universal adoption and its strong integration with direct sourcing, job advertising, and ATS tracking.

In contrast, Facebook and Instagram, though widely used, are viewed as far less effective. Only **4%** said Facebook is most effective, and just **2%** selected Instagram.

This gap suggests that while these platforms are valuable for employer branding and awareness, they do not generate the same volume or quality of hires. Some of this may reflect attribution gaps: candidates who see a role on Facebook may later apply through a careers site, and tracking might credit the site, not the social platform.

Effectiveness also correlates with investment: TA teams tend to put more budget behind LinkedIn (ads, recruiter licences), which naturally drives better results. Facebook and Instagram are often used organically or for light-touch branding, resulting in fewer direct hires.

Which social media channel is most effective?



Job Board and CV Databases

The majority of respondents leverage broad, generalist platforms as their main approach to early careers recruitment.

We've also seen a consolidation of the number of job boards used, as teams concetrate their budget and resources for efficiency.

The highest usage was among Mainly generalist job brards (e.g Totaljobs, Reed, CV Library), used by **63%** of respondents.

This preference suggests that organisations value the wide reach of these platforms to attract a diverse and large pool of candidates.

These platforms are considered essential, established tools in the recruiter's toolkit.

Despite the dominance of generalist boards, a substantial number of recruiters also use niche or sector-specific boards, suggesting a dual-strategy approach to candidate sourcing.

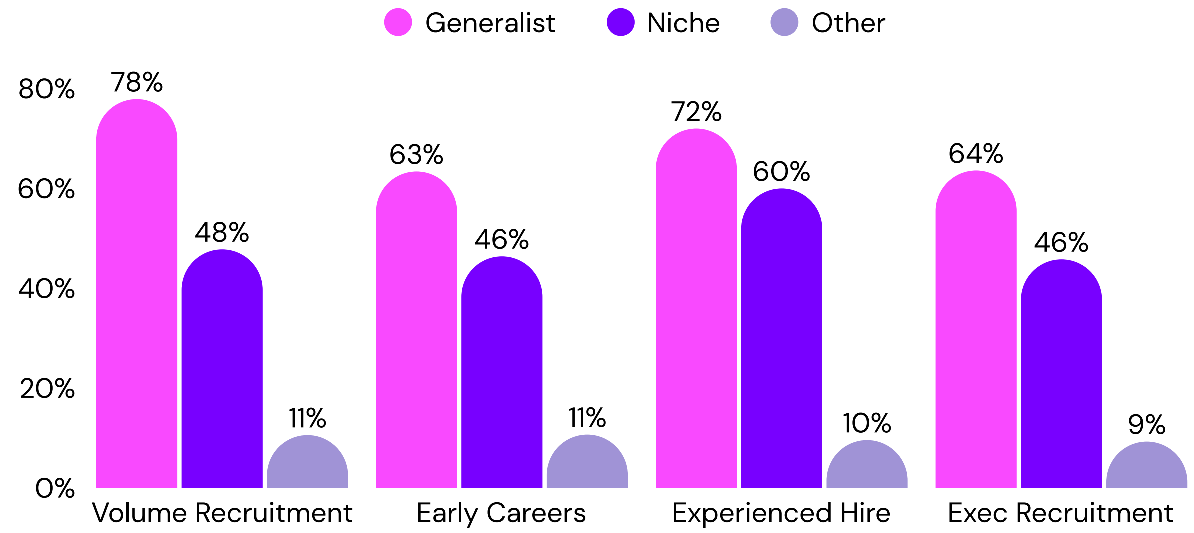
These more specific boards were used by **46.4%** of respondents. This usage points to a strategy of targeting candidates with a specific educational background or interest in a particular industry, often resulting in a more qualified applicant pool for specialised roles.

These findings indicate that, as well as LinkedIn, a significant number of recruiters adopt a blended approach, using generalist boards for volume and niche boards for focus.

A smaller portion of respondents use other methods beyond the two main categories of job boards.

Only 10.7% of respondents indicated using "Other" types of job boards or CV databases, suggesting that the existing generalist and niche job boards largely cover the immediate needs of recruitment, with only a small number of organisations using less conventional, unlisted platforms.

What types of job boards / CV Databases do you use for each recruitment need?



Interviews and Assessment

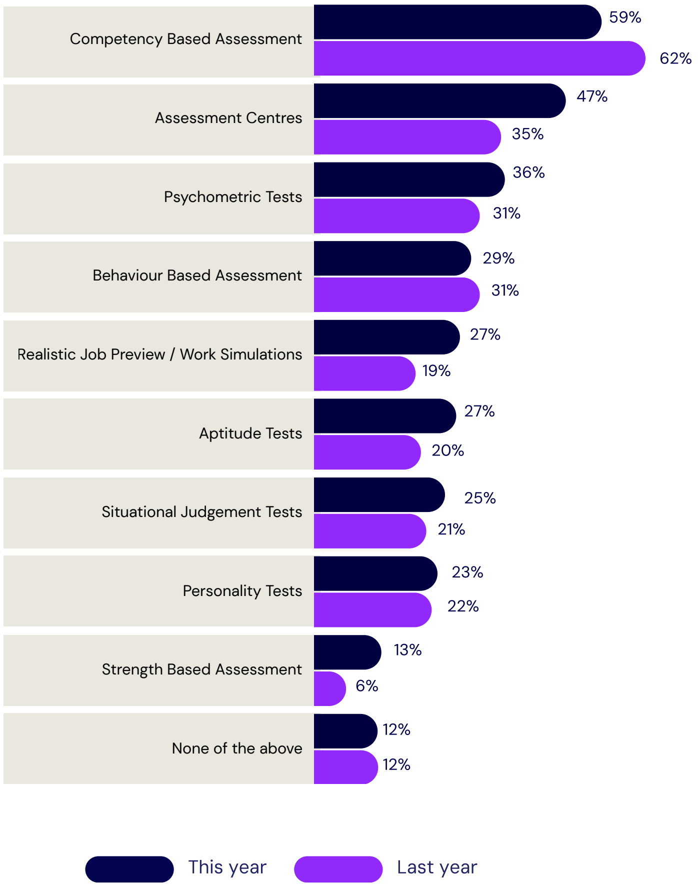
Interview practice has had to evolve in the last couple of years with the pace of new technology changing the hiring landscape.

The range of assessments now being used by respondents suggests that recruitment teams are 'stacking' assessment types to get a more rounded view of the candidate, and negate any effects of AI in the application process.

A large majority of respondents use competency-based assessments in their process (**59%** vs **62%** last year)

Situational judgement tests have strengthened again, used by **25%** this year compared to **21%** last year (and just **17%** the year before) - suggesting that skills and situational-based hiring is slowly gaining traction.

An increasing number are using assessment centres (**47%**, up from **35%** last year). Psychometric testing has also seen a small increase, at **36%** compared to **31%** last year.

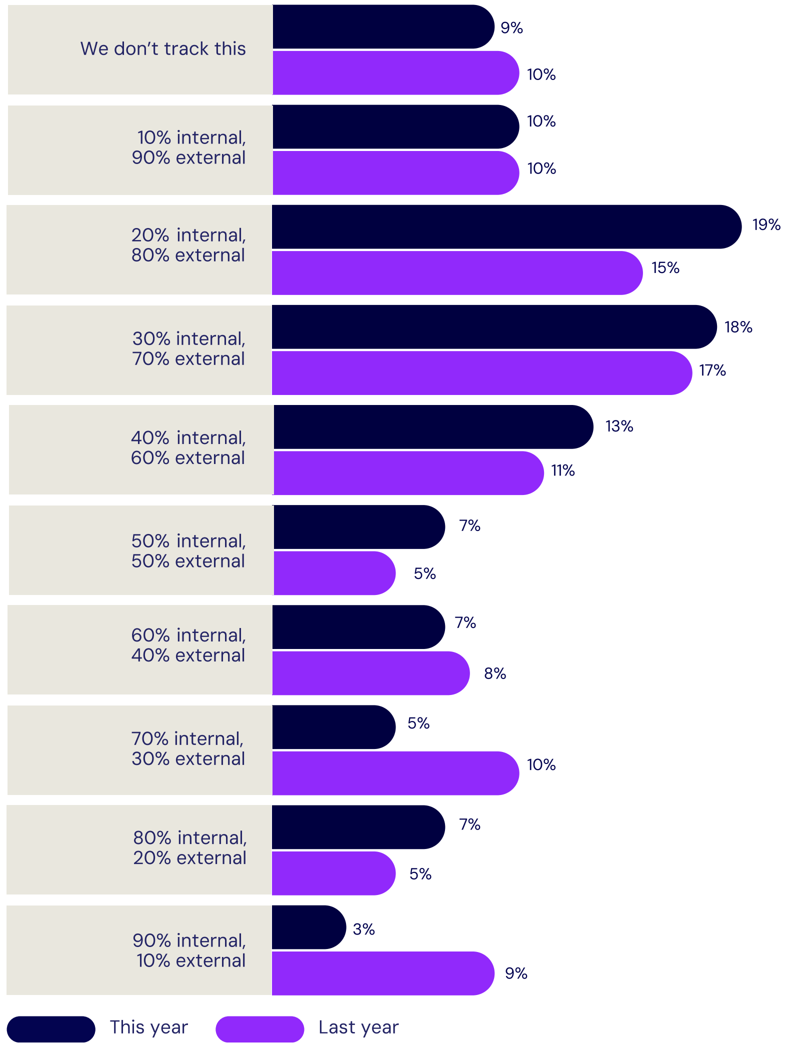


Internal vs External hiring

When asked about the proportion of internal vs external hires, the majority of respondents leaned towards hiring externally, with **62%** reporting that **60%** or more of hires come from outside of their organisation.

Within that, organisations with **90%** or more external hiring account for **13%** of all respondents.

21% of respondents rely more heavily on internal talent, with **60%** or more of their hires coming from within the organisation, and around **9%** admitting that they do not track data for this.



Measuring Success

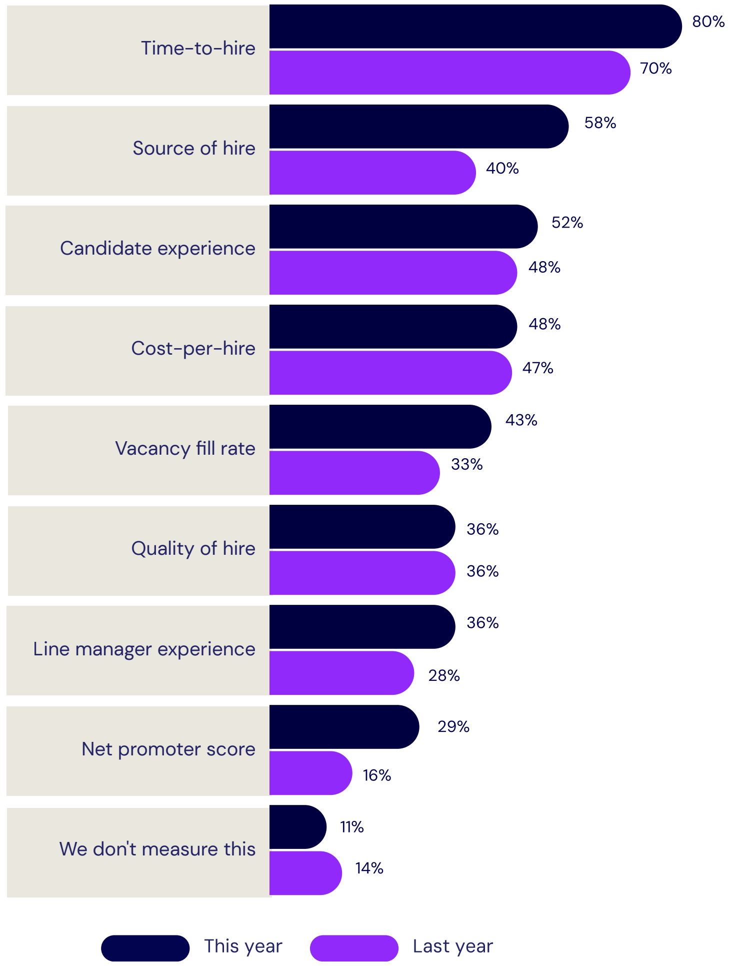
When asked about the metrics they used to measure success of their TA processes, time-to-hire came out on top as the most commonly used KPI (**80%** vs **70%** last year) - suggesting that organisations still value speed above all else.

Interestingly, the number of organisations measuring source of hire has increased significantly, rising from **40%** last year to **58%** in this year's data.

Those measuring Candidate Experience has also increased from **48%** last year to **52%** this year, reflecting it's place among the top three recruiter priorities.

Cost of hire is still a key consideration, tracked by **48%** of respondents (almost identical to the **47%** last year), reflecting continued budgetary scrutiny.

Overall, the results suggest that organisations are investing in improving their data availability and tracking more data points.



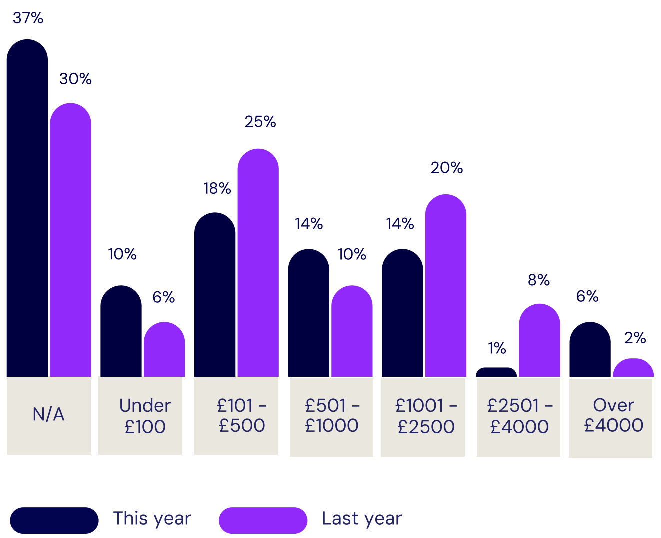
Cost per Hire

Budgetary pressures, as well as increasing access to social media and other low-cost means of hiring, can be seen in this year's cost-per-hire data.

Most organisations that track this keep hiring costs down to £101 - £500 (**18%**), with only **6%** reporting an average annual coat per hire over £4000.

A surprising **37%** do not track this number at all, up from **30%** last year.

10% of respondents keep hiring very low-cost, at under £100 per hire.

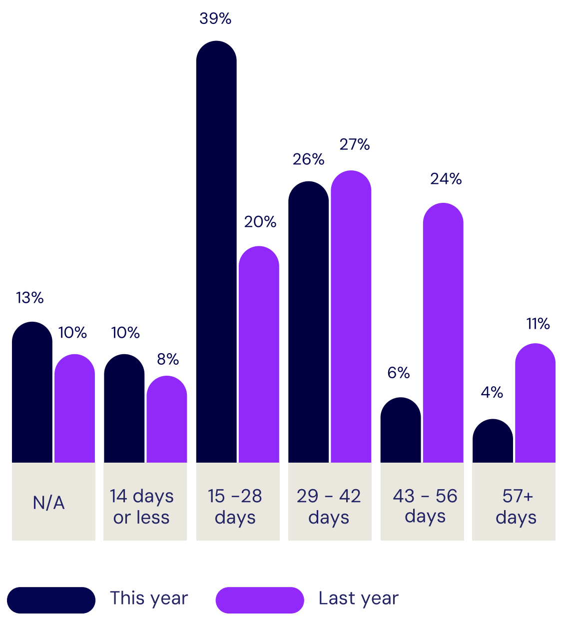


Time to Offer

When looking at time-to-offer, the majority of organisations hired in 15-28 days (**39%**) this is a huge improvement on last year at **20%.**

Just over **10%** hired in a speedy time of 14 days or less, and **4%** took a lengthy 57 days or more.

Less organisations are now tracking this metric, with **13%** reporting they don't track it vs **10%** last year, continuing a trend seen in the cost-per-hire metric.



Open Roles

Respondents were also asked how many roles in their organisation are open for 6 months or more.

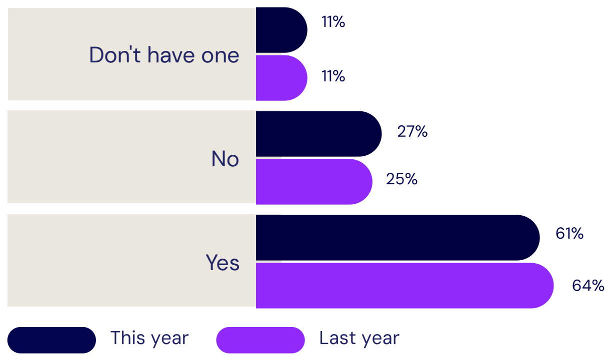
For the majority (**55%**) only 5% or fewer roles are open for this length of time, and **88%** of repondents reported this is the case for fewer than 15% of roles.

Just **3%** told us that over a quarter of roles were open for more than 6 months, suggesting that this a rare occurence for harder-to-fill or more specialist roles.

EVP and EB

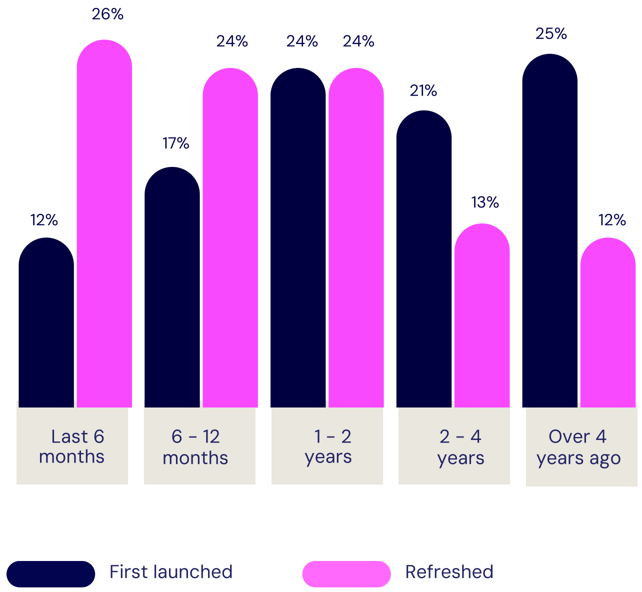
Do you consider your EVP/EB to be reflective of the current business?

Fewer respondents this year consider their EVP/employer brand to be reflective of their current business than last year – **61%** versus **64%** last year. Alongside a slight increase in those who feel their EVP/EB is not reflective of their current business, from **25%** to **27%**



How long ago was your current EVP/EB launched or refreshed?

While **74%** of responding organisations have refreshed their EVP/EB in the last 12 months (a fourteen-point increase on the **60%** from last year), many organisations have EVPs/ EBs that were launched at least two years ago (**53%** versus **44%** last year) and a quarter over four years ago (**25%** versus **26%** last year).



These figures potentially account for the increase in respondents who don't consider their EVP/employer brand to be reflective of their current business.

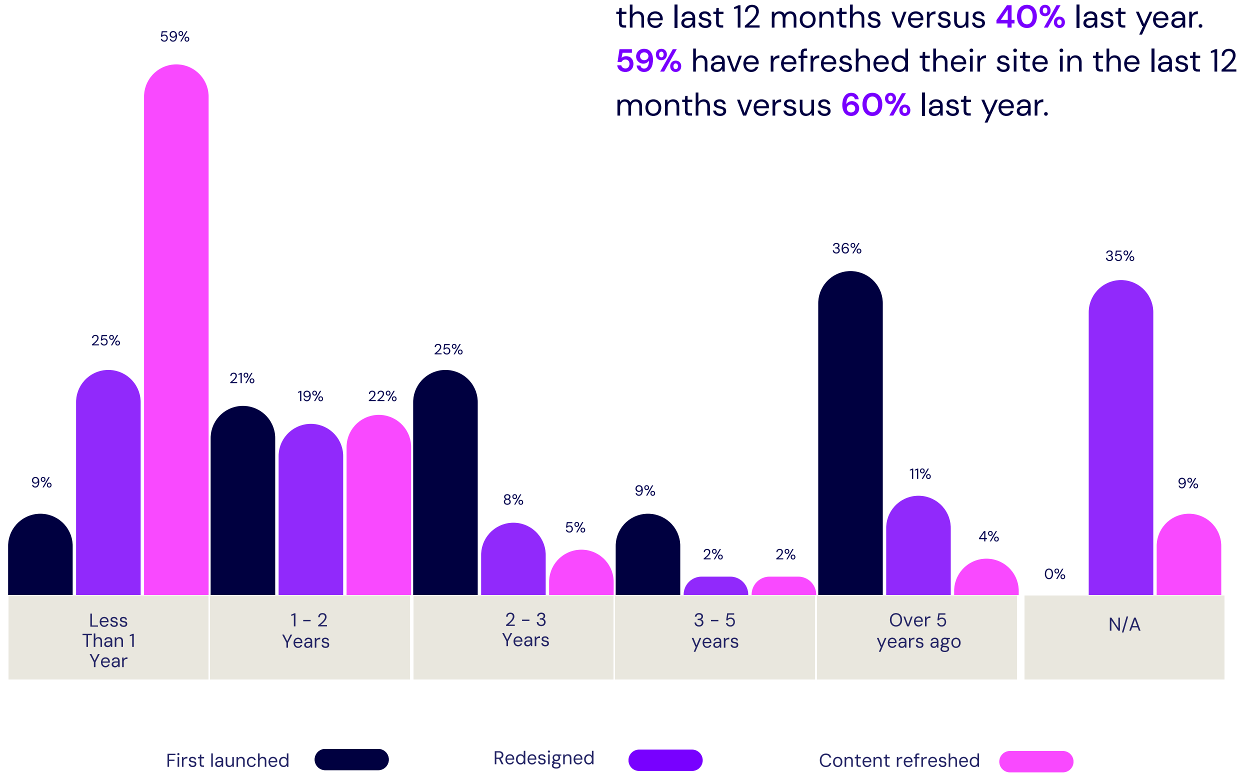
Careers Sites

How would you rate your careers site?

94% of responding organisations have a company careers site which is comparable to last year **(95%)**. The percentage of respondents rating their site as good/very good has remained steady year on year – **53%** this year versus **54%** last year.

When was your current careers site launched or refreshed?

The data suggests there has been a reduced investment in career sites in the last 12 months. For **36%** of responding organisations, their careers site was first launched over five years ago (compared to **38%** last year), and just **9%** have launched their site in the last 12 months versus **13%** last year. **25%** have redesigned their site in the last 12 months versus **40%** last year. **59%** have refreshed their site in the last 12 months versus **60%** last year.



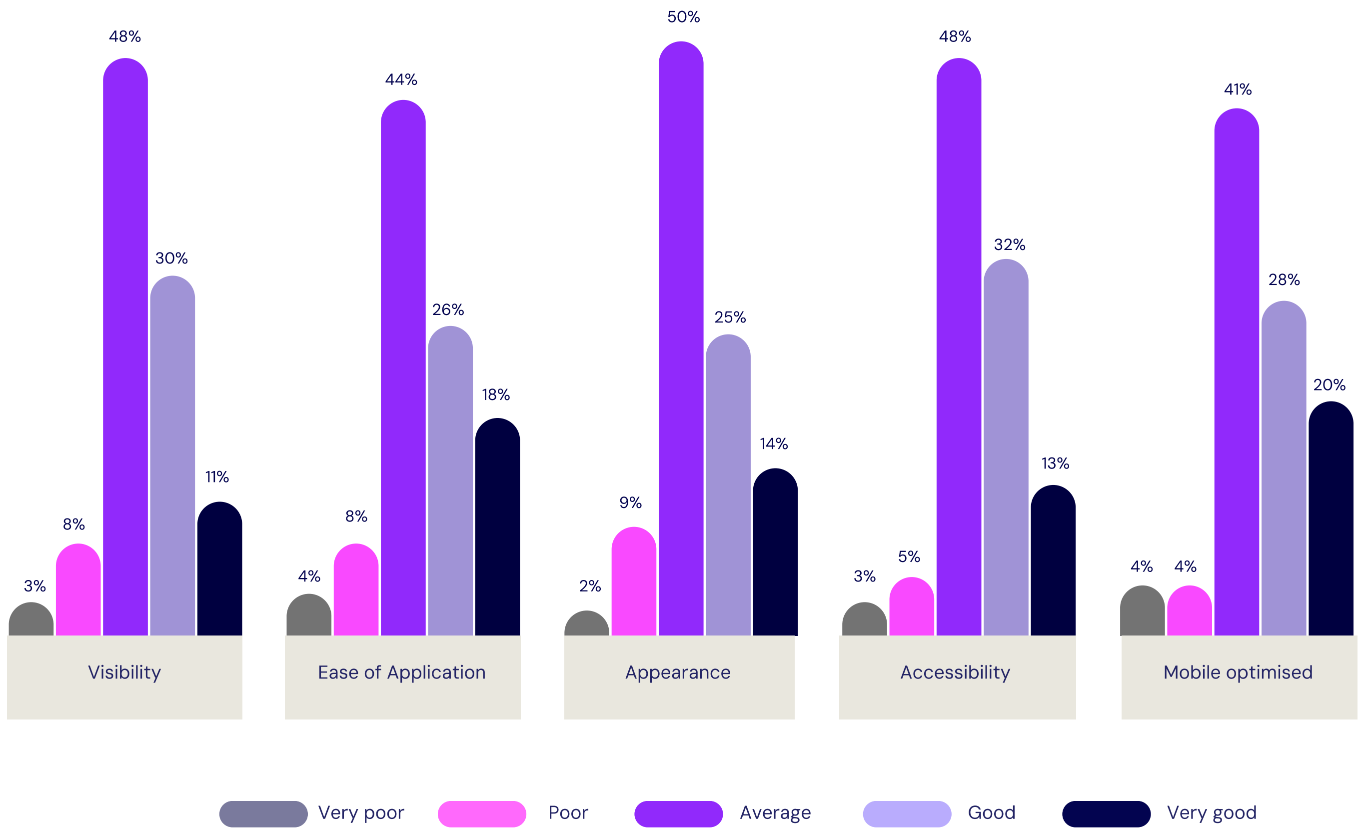
With CIPD data suggesting that an organisation's careers site is the most successful source of hire, it's potentially a missed opportunity to not invest in keeping your careers site up to date.

Sources:
CIPD, 'Resource and Talent Planning Report' 2024

How would you rate your careers site in terms of its visibility, ease of application, appearance, accessibility, and mobile optimisation?

A higher percentage of respondents rate their careers site for its ease of use with **44%** saying it's very good or good, along with mobile optimisation at **48%**.

When it comes to appearance, **14%** of respondents rank their careers site as very good, which compares to just **18%** last year – interestingly though, only **2%** consider it poor/very poor compared to **12%** last year.



ED&I

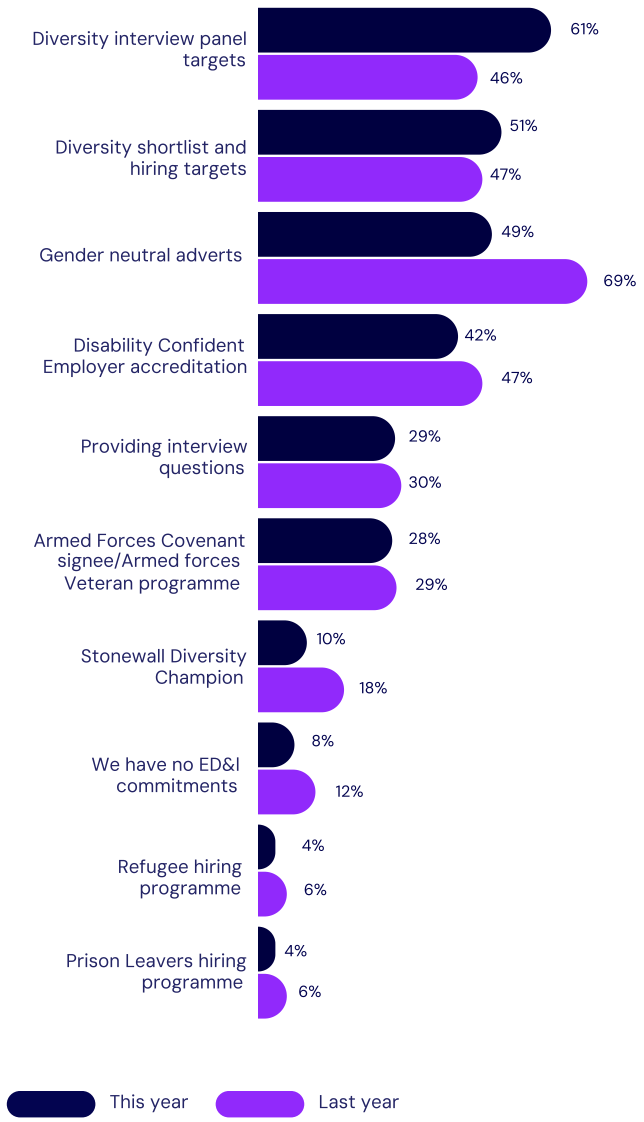
What ED&I commitments does your business have in place?

When it comes to ED&I, the most common commitments for respondents are Diversity interview panel targets **(61%)**, Diversity shortlists and hiring targets and **(51%)** gender neutral adverts **(47%)**.

There has been a year-on-year increase across most commitments, while there are exceptions such as providing interview questions and refugee and prison leaver hiring programmes.

Of those that said other, Athena Swann was mentioned as were internal policies, care leavers programmes, Women in Tech communities, the ReciteMe toolbar and a community redundancies programme.

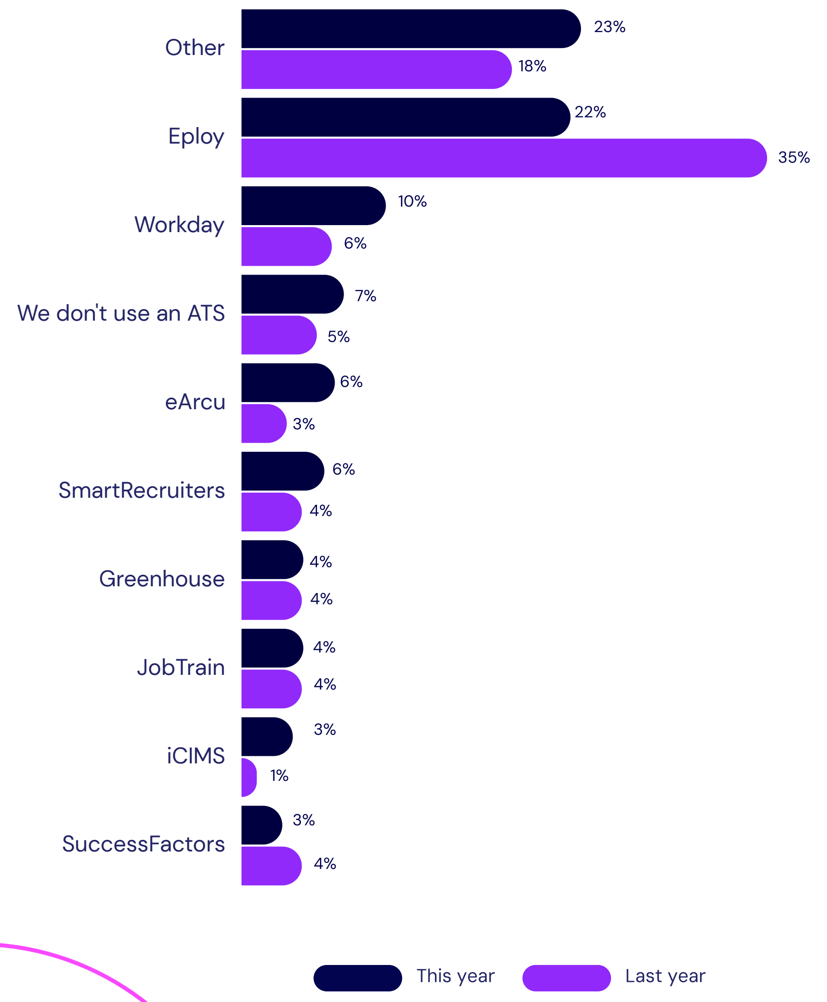
Despite the apparent de-prioritisation of ED&I, what is still postive to note the number of organisations that have no ED&I commitments - only **8%** of organisations this year have none, compared to **12%** last year.



Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)

Which ATS do you use?

Eploy is by far the most popular named ATS, used by **22%** of responding organisations. Workday, eArcu and SmartRecruiters have also seen growth this year. The biggest noticeable shift is the increase the 'Other' category at **23%**, suggesting a much more fragmented market.



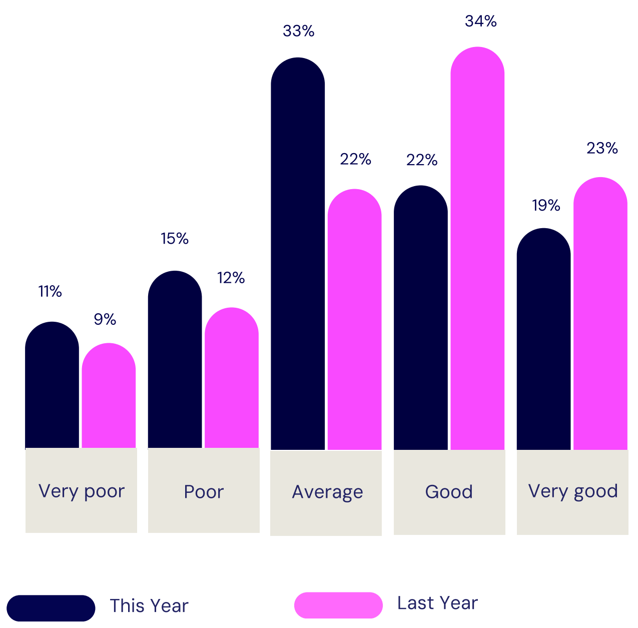
Applicant Tracking Systems (ATS)

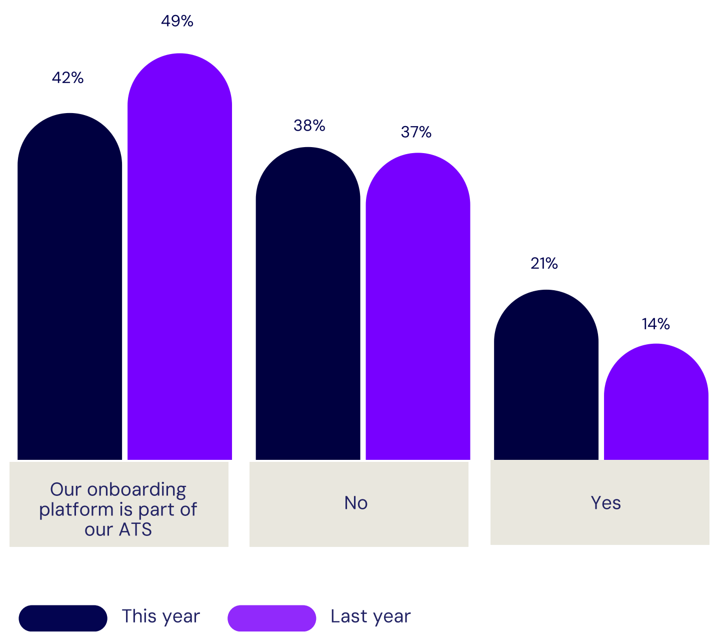
How would you rate your ATS?

This years ratings show a clear trend toward functional reliability over the past year. While the proportion of users rating their system as "Good" or "Very Good" shifted from **57%** last year to **41%** this year, this was mainly balanced by a significant increase in the "Average" rating, which now stands at **33%**. This suggests that the majority of organisations are successfully leveraging their ATS to meet their basic operational needs. The path forward lies in evolving these systems beyond this reliable baseline to integrate the advanced features necessary to support competitive demands in the modern recruitment landscape.

Do you use a dedicated platform for onboarding?

Onboarding platform usage shows a healthy, positive trend toward specialised new-hire experiences. The most promising sign is the significant rise in the adoption of dedicated onboarding platforms, which grew from **14%** last year to **21%** this year. This strategic investment reflects a growing commitment to dedicated solutions, leading to a corresponding drop in reliance on ATS-integrated modules (down from **49%** to **42%**). This overall shift indicates organisations are proactively ensuring new hires are set up for success from day one with tools designed specifically for that critical transition period.





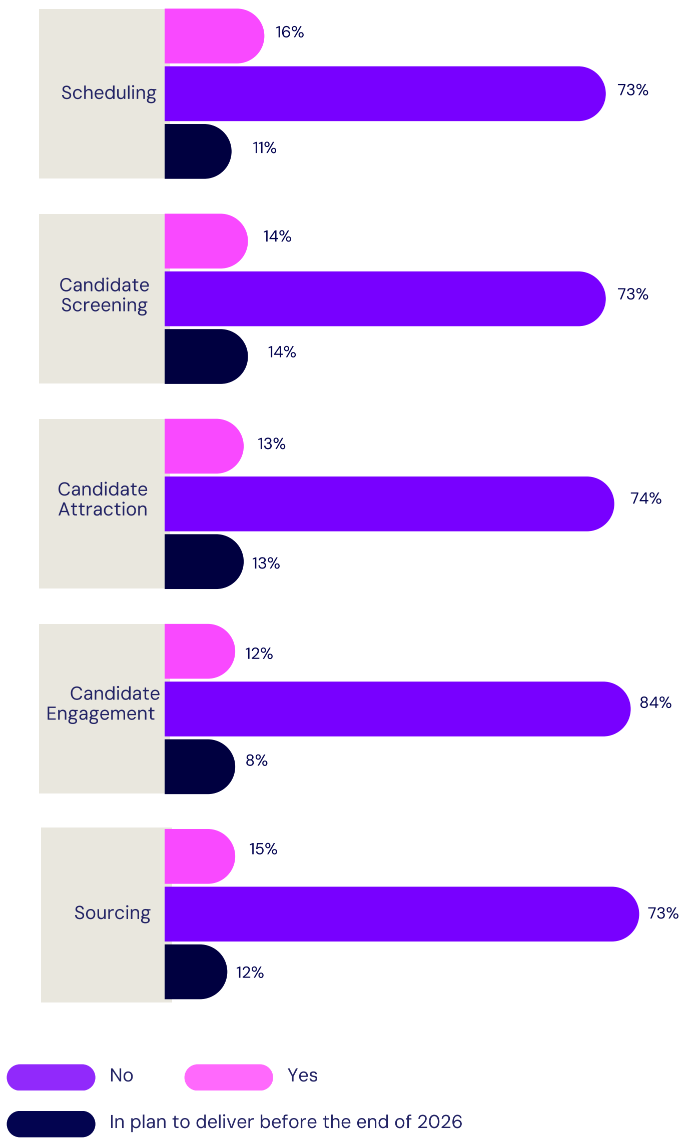
Artificial Intelligence

What do you currently use AI for?

The data on AI adoption in recruitment shows a clear and positive acceleration across the market, confirming that teams are rapidly moving AI from an aspirational concept to a vital tool for strategic efficiency. The most significant progress has been made in practical, high-volume automation, where AI usage for Scheduling Purposes has more than doubled (from **7%** to **16%**), directly addressing a major administrative bottleneck.

Similarly, Candidate Screening has seen a strong lift in adoption (from **8%** to **14%**). Teams are successfully prioritising the use of AI to automate the most time-consuming and manual challenges, thereby freeing up recruiters for high-value strategic engagement and relationship building. This positive momentum is set to continue as planned adoption rates for Screening and Candidate Engagement have both notably increased.

This signals a market-wide commitment to scaling these technologies beyond the early adopter phase and embedding AI as a fundamental, permanent component of the future Talent Acquisition operating model.



Do you use AI in other areas of your recruitment process?

A substantial **39%** of teams are leveraging Generative AI for support outside of core systemic functions like screening and scheduling, while **61%** currently do not. These other areas of adoption are primarily focused on two strategic aims: enhancing recruiter productivity and boosting recruitment marketing effectiveness. TA teams are not just investing in new platforms, but are actively integrating large language models (such as ChatGPT, Copilot, or internal GPT instances) directly into their daily workflows to maximise human output.

This usage manifests most frequently in Content Generation and Marketing, where AI is employed to help with writing compelling job descriptions and creating persuasive job adverts, as well as drafting preliminary messages to candidates. The second major focus is Recruiter Productivity and Administration, where AI acts as a digital assistant to generate summaries of reports or documents, assist with general project work, and even aid in note-taking. This adoption pattern shows that teams are strategically using AI to automate and accelerate cognitive, content-heavy tasks, thereby shifting recruiter time away from manual writing and summarising toward high-value candidate engagement.

Artificial Intelligence

Can you share any insights into how AI is impacting your recruitment process and whether you've encountered any specific opportunities or obstacles?

The primary insight into AI's impact on recruitment is a clear and often paradoxical tension between transformative efficiency and fundamental trust. The greatest opportunity identified is the immediate, tangible reduction of administrative burden: recruiters are leveraging AI for high-volume tasks like accelerating screening and automating scheduling, as well as using generative tools to quickly draft job adverts and initial candidate messages.

This successful automation is seen as a vital time-saver that frees up human effort for strategic engagement. However, this gain in efficiency is countered by the most critical obstacle identified: the threat to candidate integrity, with respondents frequently citing concerns over AI-generated applications and the potential for cheating in online interviews and assessments. This forces TA teams to spend new time and resources on verification and reinforces the necessity of human oversight in the final decision-making stages.

Do you currently have a policy in place detailing the use/misuse of AI during the recruitment and selection process?

The analysis of AI governance reveals a critical gap in the market, with only 1 in 5 currently having a formal policy in place detailing the use or misuse of AI during recruitment and selection.

This lack of clear guidance means teams are exposed to operational and ethical risks. Critically, despite the rapid acceleration of AI adoption into core functions like screening and content generation, the proportion of organisations with a policy has actually decreased over the past year, dropping from **24%** to **20%**. This indicates that the pace of technological implementation is significantly outrunning organisational governance, resulting in a widening gap between AI usage and the necessary ethical and compliance safeguards.

Looking Forward

Talent Supply and Quality Crunch

The biggest operational pain point is a fundamental skills mismatch, as the search is not just for more applicants, but for those with the specific, in-demand quality and skills needed, making the hunt for suitable candidates an uphill battle.

To address this, TA teams have to stop defaulting to a 'buy' strategy and must instead lead a proactive 'build' strategy, partnering with the business and HR to immediately launch Internal Mobility and Upskilling programs that deliberately grow your own talent. Crucially, this frees up resources to automate essential workflows and get serious about pipeline development for critical roles, starting the relationship-building process long before a vacancy actually opens up.

The Financial and Resource Squeeze

The second most common source of stress is financial, with a clear focus on budget and cost which is forcing teams to do more with less resource or reduced headcount. TA needs to stop seeing itself as a cost center and must embrace efficiency as a core metric, rigorously tracking and optimising Cost-Per-Hire and Source-of-Hire data to prioritise high-impact channels and prove the tangible return on investment (ROI) of every recruitment penny spent.

When rising salary expectations in the market clash with internal budgets, TA must partner with Compensation teams to strategically sell the Total Employee Value Proposition (EVP), emphasising career progression and flexible work to make an offer irresistible even if the base pay is limited.

Internal Alignment and Workforce Planning

A significant amount of friction is generated internally, with people worried about the capacity of their own team and a lack of robust workforce planning from the business that leaves TA constantly playing catch-up. TA must, therefore, step up to lead workforce planning, formalising its strategic role to help the business accurately forecast future skill needs and departmental vacancies, allowing the function to move from being reactive to being proactive in resource allocation. To combat the slow decision-making and inconsistency frequently flagged by the involvement of managers, TA also needs to implement compulsory, high-quality Hiring Manager as Recruiter training, ensuring all internal partners are skilled, aligned, and adhere to clear Service Level Agreements (SLAs) to eliminate internal friction and speed up the candidate journey.

Technology, Automation, and AI Disruption

The twin pressures here are managing enormous application volume and keeping pace with technology integration, with people clearly worried about the difficulty of implementing AI effectively. The path forward requires aggressive AI integration to rapidly scale the use of these tools for all high-volume, low-value tasks like screening and scheduling, thereby automating the administrative strain and freeing up human recruiters to handle the truly strategic, high-touch work.

As TA moves forward, it must also partner with IT teams to establish future-proof security protocols within the Applicant Tracking System (ATS), ensuring the integrity of the hiring process against new, sophisticated, AI-driven threats.

Employer Branding and Market Positioning

Finally, TA has a strategic fight to win in the open market, where a weak employer brand makes everything harder and more expensive, particularly when trying to find top talent. To overcome this, TA must continually evolve the EVP to ensure it reflects what modern candidates truly value-not just traditional perks, but purpose and flexible work. The most effective way to cut through the noise is through authentic, targeted storytelling, where TA uses its own employees as brand advocates on key platforms to resonate with critical segments, such as early career professionals, making the brand feel genuine and accessible.

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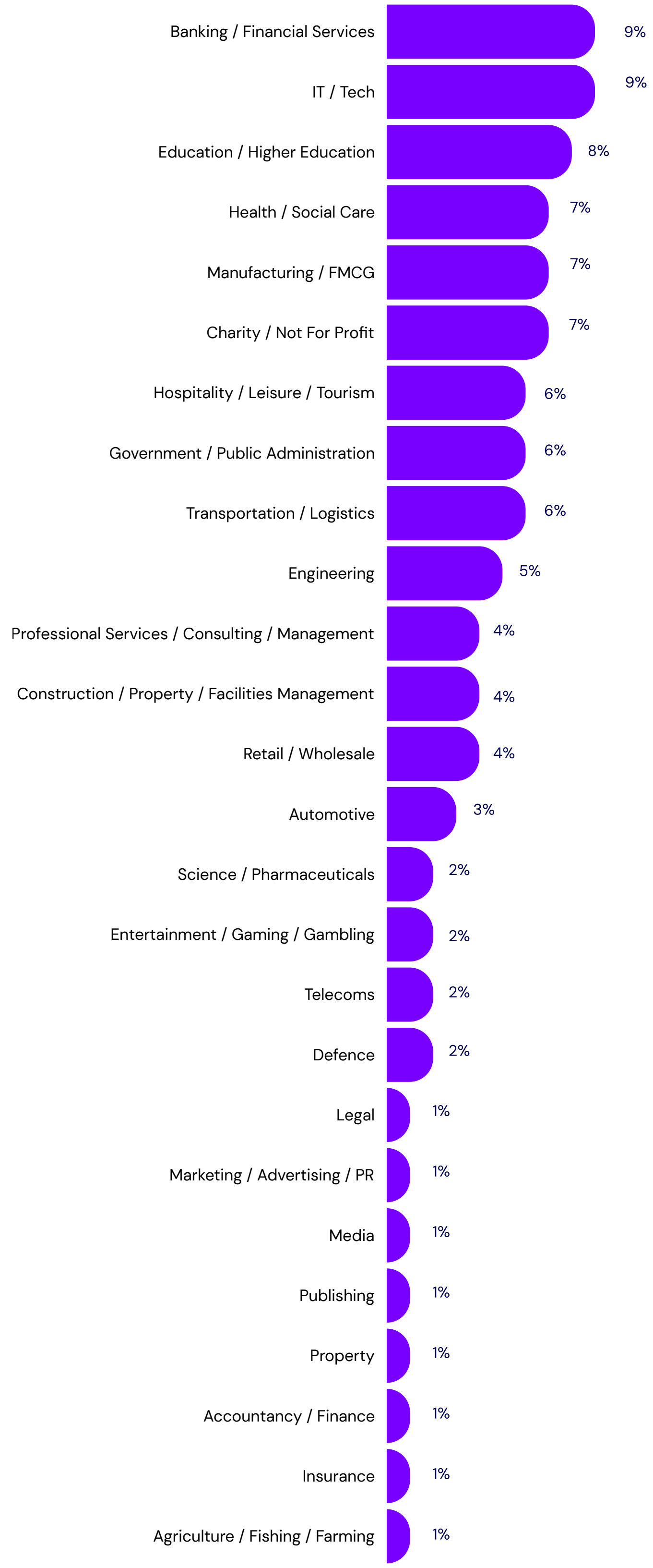
The People We Heard From

Business Sector

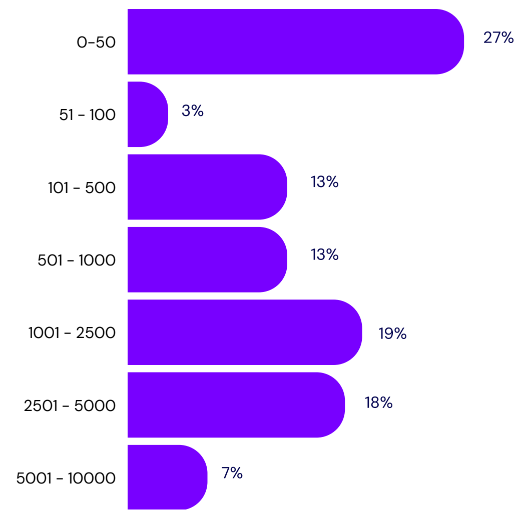
The most heavily represented sectors (accounting for nearly half of all respondents) are:

Banking / Financial Services	9%
IT / Tech	9%
Education / Higher education	8%
Health / SocialCare	7%
Manufacturing / FMCG	7%
Charity / Not For Profilt	7%
Hospitality / Leisure / Tourism	6%



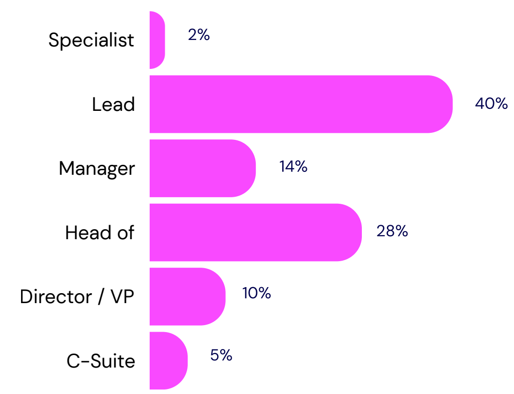
Company Size

37% of respondents work in organisations which employ less than 5,000 people, 57% below 1,000. Just 6% work in large organisations of more than 5001 people.



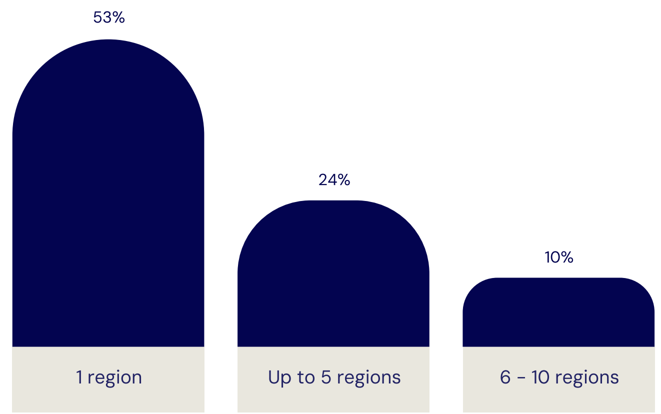
Role

Just under half of respondents (43%) are in Head Of / Senior roles. 54% are Leads / Managerial, 3% are Specialists.



UK/Global Organisations

59% of responding organisations operate in just one region, with a further 41% operating in a global capacity.



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